EQUIPPING THE BLACK CHURCH TO DISCERN AND IDENTIFY GENERATIONAL FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE BLACK CHURCH TO DISCERN
AND IDENTIFY GENERATIONAL
FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

by
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The context's problem is that the members of Greater Piney Grove United Methodist Church wrestle with generational familial dysfunction. The hypothesis is that if the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members identify the same. The final project was six weeks with qualitative methodologies consisting of pre- and post-questionnaires, interviews, Bible studies, and workshops. As the leaders of the context learned how to discern familial dysfunction, they became better able to address the issues and empower the other members to identify the same.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Psalm 133:1 state, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity.” What a true and profound statement, which is even more prevalent among family members. This research, project, and dissertation serve as a testament to the importance of family units to overcome the devastation of generational family dysfunction. To bring it to completion has taken not only my hard work but also the contributions and sacrifices of many. I want to acknowledge some of the people who helped to bring this good work to completion.

First, I would like to thank all the administration, faculty, and staff at United Theological Seminary who supported me from the time of my admission with scholarships, resources, and well-planned Intensives and cohort sessions. More particularly, I extend special gratitude to my mentors, Dr. Jonathan McReynolds and Dr. Anita Coleman, for their constant support and help from semester to semester, and even sometimes from day to day. They did whatever it took to help me overcome personal and family issues so that I could submit an academically sound body of work. I will forever be grateful to them. I also thank my faculty advisor, Dr. Reggie Abraham, who continuously offered words of affirmation and contributed his time to critique my written work with depth and feedback that helped me to write on a much higher level. They also taught me the very essence of pastoral care and counseling in such a manner that my counseling will be more impactful on the community that I serve.

A special gratitude is extended to my editor, Dr. Kenneth Cummings, who not only edited my written work but also gave me much-needed advice about the manner in which I needed to master the assignments. In his soft-spoken manner, he showed me much compassion, understanding, and patience, and helped me to grow to become a better writer.

I would also like to thank my peer associate, Karen White, who was not only my sorority sister but also my spiritual sister. Much thanks to my colleague, Kim Troy-Richardson (also my prayer partner and roommate), who traveled the highways and skyways with me from North Carolina to Ohio for three years. Both always listened to me vent and then encouraged me to see things in a positive manner. In the midst of illness and death, they encouraged me to remain steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in this good work. I am grateful to have had them by my side throughout this journey.

Finally, I acknowledge my professional associates: Dr. Kathy Newton Dunton, Dr. Miranda Page, and Dr. Melba McCallum. All of them lent their professional insight and support as they not only served as readers of my paper but also as supporters of the work that I do in my church context. Along with them, I acknowledge my contextual associates who gave me insight into the church families, assisted with my project, and led the leadership and members of the church to be supportive over the three years that I matriculated at United. To all of these amazing people, I extend many blessings and much love.

DEDICATION

This doctoral dissertation is first and foremost dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who has kept me from day to day. Then to the three amazing people who literally held me up throughout the entire journey: my husband, Winfred Olin Murdaugh, Jr; my son, Winfred "Chip" Olin Murdaugh, III; and my mother, Dr. Flossie Bartell Jackson. They loved me through some difficult times and made great sacrifices for me every moment of every day. These three are indeed the wind beneath my wings.

I further dedicate this work to Greater Piney Grove United Methodist Church and its leaders and members. Godspeed to them for allowing me the time away to travel and write. For those who were participants in my project, I especially dedicate this dissertation to you; for without your willingness to trust me enough to share your stories, this work would not have been successful. This dedication is to all of you who stayed grounded and gave me the freedom to not only fly but soar to greater heights.

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ABBREVIATIONS

HBCUs	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
UMC	United Methodist Church

It takes wisdom to have a good family. It takes understanding to make it strong. It takes knowledge to fill a home with rare and beautiful treasures

—Proverbs 24:3-4

INTRODUCTION

This doctoral work has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. It afforded me the opportunity to study family issues that have troubled me for my entire life. I come from a dysfunctional family and know the issues that are related to generational family dysfunction. When I was appointed as pastor to Greater Piney Grove United Methodist Church (hereinafter referred to as Piney Grove), I recognized that the families in the church were very much like my own family, and I became even more committed to addressing the issues surrounding this type of dysfunction. This thesis is entitled "Equipping the Black Church to Discern and Identify Generational Family Dysfunction." The hypothesis is that if the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members identify the same.

Also, this work was challenged by personal issues that arose during the course of the three years that I matriculated at United Theological Seminary. I dealt with my husband's health declining, and I also encountered my own health problems. However, I am so grateful to God for strengthening my family and me to fight the good fight and stay committed to completing this project. Most rewarding in this entire process was actually doing the six-week process. I built even closer relationships with the ten participants, and I learned so much about them and their family dynamics. We all grew closer and gained a new level of respect for each other as we learn the crises that each of us had overcome.

Chapter One, Ministry Focus, highlights how the members of the Piney Grove family are very important. Another aspect that I have in common with the members of the church is that there is a lot of intermarrying among the families. This means that brothers and sisters of one family married the brothers and sisters or first cousins of another family, making them all double cousins (first and/or second). This is unique, and while sometimes a person can draw strength from such unity, it can also contribute to dysfunctional behavior because the family units are so tied together, the victims can feel as if there is no way to escape the harmful behavior.

> Family can be one of our greatest sources of physical security and emotional support. But family environments can also foster destructive emotions and behaviors, including substance abuse and addiction. The genetic ties that make blood relatives so close can also hold the seeds of compulsive or addictive behaviors, and the self-harming actions that children observe in their parents can become habits that affect their own lives as they grow.[1]

Instead of attempting to address all the dysfunctional behavior, this project proposed to train the leaders of the church to discern and identify dysfunctional behavior, and ultimately teach others how to do the same.

Chapter Two, Biblical Foundations, addresses the dysfunctional behavior of not only Jacob's sons but every generation of Abraham up to that point. The resources were not available in biblical days, but these and much more resources are available today to help break the generational curses and to also encourage families to talk out their feelings, seek resolutions, and receive help when necessary. However, even in this twenty-first century season, those "what ifs" cannot be addressed until the oppressors and

[1] American Addiction Centers Editorial Staff, "Family Addiction: How Does Addiction Affect Families?" 2023, htpps://americanaddictioncenteres.org.

the oppressed are able to discern and identify that this is not normal behavior, but dysfunctional. That is where this project is headed. In the biblical text under discussion, Genesis 45, Joseph exhibited a marvelous attitude as he extended forgiveness to his brothers instead of continuing the dysfunctional behavior that had haunted his family for generations.

Chapter Three, Historical Foundations, looks at the impact that the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) had in empowering former slaves during the Reconstruction Era. After the Civil War, most Black people were left to fend for themselves after generations of being controlled by their former masters. Families had been split up; slaver had disempowered and crippled people; and they were made to remain illiterate but expected to understand things that they were never taught. HBCUs afforded an opportunity for Black Americans to be educated, self-sufficient, and empowered. Most of them started off as seminaries or bible schools because that was the level that Blacks needed to learn. Education is the key to freedom and power, and HBCUs have empowered many to be able to discern dysfunctional behavior and make a better life for themselves and their children.

Chapter Four, Theological Foundations, addresses Minjung Theology. While the Black Liberation Theology does an excellent job in pointing out all the ways that Blacks have been oppressed, it does not empower the oppressed to address the sin of dysfunctional and oppressive behavior, even if it comes from a family member. This project will delve deep into the signs of familial dysfunction to help the members be able to discern, define, identify, and address dysfunction as it is considered sin or *han,* as the Korean culture calls it, when addressing minjung.

Chapter Five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, looks at the psychology of the family and the many ways that family members interact with each other, which can lead to dysfunctional behavior. The study of the psychology of the family is very important in helping us to define and recognize functional and dysfunctional behavior. We must first know that something is wrong before we can address it. Psychologists agree that their most significant challenges have been in trying to treat people emotionally, mentally, and physically when they do not understand that something is wrong. That has also been the challenge at Piney Grove and many other churches, especially family churches. Pastors are not just addressing the issues of individuals but entire families, and these families have a very difficult time accepting that their way of life is not good and borders on dysfunctional. The psychology of the family is a major step in helping them to understand the meaning of dysfunctional behavior and then recognize where it exists in their own lives, families, and the life of the church context.

Chapter Six, Project Analysis, gives an outline of the project itself, detailing the activities of each week's session. An overview of the topics was explained and discussed. This chapter explains the methodology used and how data were collected and analyzed, thus proving the hypothesis to be credible. A certified psychologist with expertise in the psychology of the family conducted two sessions with the leadership, which gave them a clinical view of dysfunction and the ways that it can be discerned and identified.

This project has intentionally looked at every aspect of life when attempting to address the best way to empower others about discerning, and at some point, addressing dysfunctional behavior. It has looked at such behavior from biblical days to slavery and post-slavery eras to the present time and found that the one thing that each era has in

common is that family members are still living under generational curses, because they have failed to stop oppressing each other with dysfunctional behavior. This project sought to aid in liberating the leaders of Greater Piney Grove UMC, and those leaders will, in turn, be able to help other members of the context recognize dysfunctional behavior and thus discontinue hurting each other.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Upon reflecting on my spiritual autobiography and contextual analysis of Greater Piney Grove United Methodist Church in Maxton, North Carolina, it has been determined that the problem is that the members of Greater Piney Grove United Methodist Church wrestle with generational familial dysfunction. The hypothesis is that if the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members identify the same. "Dysfunctional behavior refers to any impairment, disturbance, or deficiency in behavior that hinders proper functioning, whether it be in an individual, between individuals, or within a system like a family."[1]

As I look back at that premature baby who did not seem to have a fighting chance in this world, that four-year-old little girl who was a victim of sexual abuse, that confused young adult who landed in a difficult career, that mourning mother who lost four babies, that young married woman who became a caregiver early in her marriage and that young pastor who was judged so harshly, I no longer see victims but conquerors. My spiritual autobiography can be summed up in two words: "never forsaken," because God refused to leave my side or give up on me. He walked with me and talked with me all along the

[1] Kaytee Gillis, "Invisible Bruises: Are All Families Functional?" *Psychology Today*, October 30, 2024, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/invisible-bruises/202410/are-all-families-dysfunctional.

journey. He held my hand when I could not walk with Him and carried me when I could not carry myself. I am exactly where I am supposed to be. No longer will I receive the mumblings of others that, had I not been delayed, I could possibly be considered for bigger and better appointments. I am in the best place I could be – exactly where God wants me to be. God is using me to make a substantial impact on the lives of some amazing people and spreading His Word, love, grace, and mercy in this community, and this is more enriching than I could ever imagine.

As I matriculated through this program at United Theological Seminary, I have dealt with many serious illnesses in myself and my husband and obstacles that seem insurmountable. Even the generational dysfunction in my family of alcoholism haunts me daily, as I deal with the stressors of worrying about my eighty-year-old alcoholic father. Such concerns, issues, and constant negative lifestyles and behavior of others in my family are still a part of my life story. So, while my spiritual autobiography is certainly still "writing" itself, and life has not always been a crystal staircase, I would not take anything for my journey now, because on this path, I was never forsaken by my God.

Piney Grove is uniquely known for being a strong family church. It is unique because there are a lot of intermarriages in the church. The generations up until around 1980 were established by brothers and sisters of one family marrying the brothers and sisters of another family. That actually has caused the current membership to all be siblings or first and second cousins. Only two families in the church are not a part of this interlocking group. The original families were made up of up to twenty-one children per couple; therefore, the membership is large for the area, with 323 members and an average worship attendance of over 100. This number has decreased since returning after the

pandemic; however, the church offers in-person, Zoom, and Facebook Live access to worship services, thus reaching even more people. The members of the key families are the effective leaders of the church, and while many moved away in their youth, they have returned to the rural community and are very committed to the church.

Context

Piney Grove's present history has been ascertained by my personal observations of the last eight years and input from a contextual group of members that was formed. I organized a group of seven members with the following demographics: varied ages ranging from the 20s to 70s, two men and five women, five born and bred members, and two who married into the church and community. Neither of the latter two is from the area or county of the church, and one is from a different state. Also, three of the original members left the church at some point in their adult lives and returned. From their experiences growing up in the church, raising their families in the church, and being in church leadership positions, they were able to share a broad range of views and perspectives on the church's present history and context.

Regarding the strengths of the church, everyone, including me, believes that the most prominent strength is that Piney Grove is a family-oriented church. Because just about everyone in the church is related by blood or marriage, they tend to come together in times of loss and need. This strength is an interesting one because, at the same time, many of the family dynamics are dysfunctional and erratic. This state of being has not only caused rifts in the family structures, but also in the church. This will be further discussed below. The second strength is that while some churches do not have many

children, Piney Grove is blessed to have had many children from one generation to the next. The church has a genetic heritage of multiple births. Most families have at least one set of twins or triplets. Currently, the church has more than fifty children between the ages of infancy through eighteen years old. The gift of children is always a strength because it gives the church a hope for a grand future. Furthermore, longevity is also a strength, and the senior adult members are living to be over 100 years old; currently, the oldest member is 101 years old. Obviously, the church families are descendants of a strong "stock of people." The third strength is that these rural people believe in higher education. Over seventy percent of the members either achieve a college degree, including post-graduate degrees, or enter into the military. Also, many of them return to the rural area and raise their families on the land of their ancestors. Since the closing of the industries and mills that dominated the area until the early 2,000's, they either get jobs in education, medicine, or commute to larger cities to work. Some live in the larger cities of North Carolina, like Fayetteville, Raleigh, and Charlotte, and still attend church weekly and serve in leadership roles. Their commitment to the church and community is admirable.

The weaknesses of the church are very challenging. In addition to some of the weaknesses that were pointed out above, along with the strengths, there are other weaknesses that are so prevalent and long-standing that they appear to be generational curses. First, they are related to the interesting family structure of the church, wherein everyone is related in some manner. There is a strong issue with addiction from alcohol to drugs to gambling. These addictions have weakened and even destroyed some families. There have been and may still be incidences of abusive husbands and fathers, and sexual

molestation against children in the families. Sibling rivalries exist in various families, and discourse is also an issue as heirs quarrel over property rights. Some family members feel superior to others, and although everyone is family, there is a "haves" and "have-nots" division in the church.

Second, there is also the challenge of the lack of empowerment among the people. With such a high level of education, the discipline of a military background and the ownership of their own land, the people do not aspire to have much wealth, because instead of investing in valuable homes that will appreciate in value, they rather spend their wealth on expensive cars, motorcycles, clothes, trips, and other depreciating items. They also fail to tithe or save, and the need for financial literacy and deliverance is strong, but the desire for such a class is almost non-existent. Their complacency in their current situations is troubling. I have preached about Jesus' promise from John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (NRSVA).

We have had in-depth studies about the Lord's desire that we prosper, even as our souls prosper. The discussions are uplifting and hopeful, and yet, I have not been able to observe many people who seemed to want more. Again, this is a generational issue.[2] This is prevalent in my own family because there are members of my family who would rather buy an expensive luxury car than a home. Then they envy those who do work hard and aspire to have more. When I was very young, up until age seven, we lived in subsidized housing, which was known as "the projects." My mom worked very hard to move us out of that community, and when I was still young, she and my stepdad, who raised me, were

[2] I established a Contextual Group at Piney Grove United Methodist Church in September of 2022 to explore issues pertaining to growth, development, and administration.

able to provide us with our own home. Subsequently, she would get ridiculed for "thinking that she was better than everyone else." Even after I was an adult, I would hear others say that my mom moved out and forgot her family and friends in the project. The jealousy and envy were rampant for my mom, who was a high school dropout but later matriculated in institutions of higher education, attained her Doctorate of Education, and became a school assistant superintendent. Those who remained in the projects have always tried to make her feel bad for wanting more for herself and her children.

It has been over fifty-three years since we lived in subsidized housing, but we still deal with the issues of others not being able to understand why my mother wanted more. They see the results of her hard work and the hard work of my stepfather/dad, not only in her educational success, but also in the success of her four children, who became an engineer, attorney/pastor, educator, and pediatrician. While some of the naysayers have successful children, and many have children who are upstanding, hardworking citizens, none that I am aware of can share the professional success stories of my family. Let me be clear that this certainly does not make us better than them; it is only shared to show that in this manner, we did not fall victim to some of the generational issues of our peers.

Ministry Journey

My life's journey intersects with the journey of the people of my context because I have experienced some of the same issues that have and still affect this church and community. As I reflect on my life, one of my earliest childhood memories is a sad one. At the age of four, I was sexually molested by a relative. I was in my forties before I shared this with my mother, and I have never told my father. Also, I know what it means

to come from a farming background. My grandparents, who raised me, were farmers up until the year of my birth. Although they stopped farming, my other family members and family friends continued to do so, and I also learned how to work on the farm. Although I mainly lived in "town" with my grandparents, my parents lived in the "country," so I spent a great deal of my time there working in the tobacco fields and barns, picking beans, peas, cucumbers, and whatever other produce that the area farmers planted. Like the people in my context, I learned the value of hard work and the pride of producing crops that either helped to pay for my existence or served as produce for our table. I also know the impact of drug and alcohol addiction, which is prevalent on both sides of my family. Both my maternal and paternal families had people, especially men, who were substance abusers for generations. The addictions could make them mean, disrespectful, and abusive to the women in their lives. Therefore, I have witnessed domestic violence in my own family from a young age.

As a result of my own background, I have always had a desire to serve the marginalized people of our world. My educational and vocational background has always been working with this population of people. As an attorney, I was awarded several years for my pro bono work representing impoverished people, women who were victims of domestic violence, and young offenders who were charged with drug and alcohol related crimes. As a community college administrator, I worked directly with a population of people who were unemployed or dislocated workers. People who had spent many years of their lives either farming or working in industries, and when those jobs were no longer available, found themselves starting over in either the middle or the end of their working years. Our department was there to offer them education that would prepare them for

other work, such as in the educational and/or medical field. As I moved into my work as a minister, I was first assigned to work with all of the African American United Methodist churches of eastern North Carolina, where 90% were rural and made up of mostly impoverished people. I taught them how to write grants and seek assistance to help empower them to become more self-sufficient individuals and as a group. This was in the hope that they could enhance their educational and outreach ministries. As a pastor, I have served three rural churches and seen the effects of poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. I can relate to all of these areas because I have lived them, and I have made it my life's work to alleviate the context and community that I presently serve from not only poverty, but all states of dysfunction.

In addition to my experience in legal counseling and pastoral care, I have served as a grief counselor for over twenty-two years and as a family counselor for fifteen years. In these two areas, I have worked with a population that extends from very small children to senior adults, and many have experienced grief in many ways, not just death. My parents have been owners of funeral homes for over fifty years. At the death of my dad, who raised me (officially stepfather), I inherited his interest along with my mom and sister; therefore, I am now a co-owner of three funeral homes. With that business comes the usual need for grief therapy as the family members of our clientele need therapeutic support. However, as a grief therapist, I have served people who are grieving the loss of their marriage, foreclosure of their homes, extensive loss after a hurricane or natural disaster, and other areas of loss. Some of these people are poor, and some are not. In my context, there has been a great need for grief therapy. Another unique thing about this church is that it suffers a lot of loss due to deaths. Three out of the eight years that I have

served, I officiated over twenty funerals each year, and in the other years, we experienced a great deal of loss as well. In January of 2025, we have already had five deaths. When serving an impoverished population, I have been called to help young mothers who have lost their children to the Department of Social Services, people whose jobs have been lost due to industry closures, and, again, family units that have been shattered due to divorce. I have found that in addition to serving as a counselor for victims of these losses, I also need to help them find a safe space where they can open up to others with similar situations. This shows them that they are not the only people dealing with such losses; therefore, they find commonalities with others and often find solitude from shared losses. I share my life's work to show that my knowledge regarding generational dysfunction has come from either experiencing it myself or serving others who experienced it.

Develop Synergy

As I study my context and my life/ministry journey, I find that they converge in many ways. Again, I have either been a victim of some of the issues that the people in my context experience, or I have counseled and worked directly hands-on with people who have experienced the same issues that have affected those in my context. First, I was a victim of child sexual molestation, and that has seemingly been a generational curse in my context. For generations, this has been happening and hidden within the confines of this church, and in my family setting. Like me, most of these victims are afraid to speak up and have been made to feel as if they are the culprits rather than the victims. The perpetrators have been able to violate young girls and boys and get away with it. No one wants to hear the stories of the victims, and some victims have even been accused of

"asking for it" by the way that they may have dressed or simply giggled. This is outrageous in any situation, but especially when you consider that these victims are young children.

After years of this type of behavior, we are dealing with former victims becoming perpetrators, and the curse goes on. The need for these victims to be delivered and healed from their molestation is definitely a big one. The decision to use the local church as the site for special workshops, training, healing meetings, and addiction group sessions is very important because the church needs to redeem itself as an entity that no longer ignores these issues. In other sectors, when infractions occur or laws are broken, leaders are mandated to report them to the proper authority, and the church should be no different. Likewise, in North Carolina, clergy are also mandated reporters.

There are some victims who feel as if the church failed them in the past years by not addressing the issues. To those who have been oppressed or victimized, the church taking action in addressing their pain and oppression may be a very important part of the healing process. It also may help the image of the church change from being a source of secrecy for the perpetrators to being a refuge and beacon of light for the oppressed. They also have had to deal with their perpetrators being allowed by the pastor to preach and sit in the pulpits or preach on Sunday mornings after violating them on Saturday nights. This has caused them not to want to come to their home church and even find solace in religious settings that are not always healthy alternatives.

Another place where the issues of my context and my journey intersect is our common background of substance abuse. Many of the families in my context have dealt with generations of alcoholism and drug addiction. In my context, such issues lead to

domestic violence and divorces. The same has happened in my family. I have the culprits of alcoholism and drug addiction on both sides of my family. While drug addictions are frowned upon, they are not addressed in a healthy manner. These addicts and dealers in my family take advantage of the addicts. This is the same in my context. Alcoholism seems to be accepted as a norm in my family, especially among the men, and the same is true in my context.

First, I find it essential to educate the people of the context with the knowledge of how valuable it is to have such a rich history, family connection, and strength. Second, notwithstanding the problem statement, "the members of Greater Piney Grove UMC wrestle with generational familial dysfunction," the church body nonetheless will be moved to acknowledge the issue after more discernment and will be empowered to overcome the curses that have haunted them for decades. The next step after this project would be to establish an outreach ministry that addresses alcohol and drug addiction, overcoming sexual abuse, molestation, pain, and shame, and eradicating domestic violence counseling. An in-church center addressing these issues would definitely bring forth healing and growth in such a manner that the context will make an even more significant impact on the community.

In this future step, I will use my many years of counseling, my legal background and understanding of the legal system, and my experience as a pastor and person of compassion to reach out to those in the context who are hurting. My ministerial skills have allowed me the opportunity to learn how to develop support groups for people with similar problems. I have developed support groups for infertile couples, victims of miscarriages, victims of crimes, and victims of alcohol and drug abuse. I have also

reached out to aid young girls who live a promiscuous lifestyle, many times due to being victimized at a young age. This experience, along with knowing how to set up these support groups, would be one of the ways that we address the problem. Studies show that there is a known correlation between poverty and addictive behavior.

Although there is no evidence that demonstrates cause and effect between poverty, yet,

> The relationship between addiction and poverty is complicated. Lower income people are slightly more likely to struggle with drug or alcohol abuse, but this doesn't necessarily mean that poverty causes addiction. In some cases, financial troubles are the result of a substance use disorder. One frequently cited example of how poverty affects addiction risk is the Appalachian opioid epidemic. Stretching from the Southern Tier of New York to northern Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia, the Appalachian region of the United States has struggled with widespread poverty since the early 1900s. The majority of the available jobs are physically demanding, carrying a high risk of injuries despite their relatively low wages. Residents who begin taking opioids to cope with chronic pain from their employment-related injuries often find themselves spiraling into addiction. The effects of substance abuse make it nearly impossible to keep working, thus perpetuating financial struggles.[3]

This study from the St. Joseph Institute of Addiction Center shares that poverty can be a factor in people turning to addictions. That is a very dangerous and irresponsible generalization to make, because it is not always the case. Many impoverished people never fall prey to addictive behaviors; however, with the stress of poverty, the financial troubles associated with poverty, and the need to find coping methods due to poverty, some impoverished people do seek refuge in substance-abusive behaviors. Another study from the Mayo Clinic indicates that support groups are effective in helping people to

[3] St. Joseph Institute, "Understanding the Relationship Between Poverty and Addcition," St. Joseph Institute for Addiction, June 18, 2018, https://stjosephinstitute.com/understanding-the-relationship-between-poverty-and-addiction/.

overcome all types of trauma, including addictions. Support groups bring together people who are going through or have gone through similar experiences. For example, this common ground might be cancer, chronic medical conditions, addiction, bereavement, or caregiving.

> A support group provides an opportunity for people to share personal experiences and feelings, coping strategies, or firsthand information about diseases or treatments. For many people, a health-related support group may fill a gap between medical treatment and the need for emotional support. A person's relationship with a doctor or other medical personnel may not provide adequate emotional support, and a person's family and friends may not understand the impact of a disease or treatment. A support group among people with shared experiences may function as a bridge between medical and emotional needs.[4]

I have found that support groups are effective in many cases. Too often, people have found much support from these groups. It helps to know that others are experiencing some of the same temptations and issues that the victim is experiencing. Sitting in a circle can be therapeutic to a troubled soul. I have experienced the positive effects of support groups as a victim of infertility and miscarriage. In those group meetings, I heard other hopeful mothers-to-be and couples tell their stories. I learned about doctors and mechanisms to use, and I also learned that it was alright to cry, be dismayed, and even be hopeless. I have also been in a support group for co-dependents as I have dealt with the addictions of my father, brother, and sister. I have heard horrifying stories from family members of substance abuse, and I have also been encouraged to stop being an enabler by giving them money or other unhealthy support. Therefore, I know that support groups are helpful, because I and other members of my family have been beneficiaries of such types of groups.

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[4] Mayo Clinic Staff, "Healthy Lifestyle, Stress Management," Mayo Clinic, August 2022, https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/support-groups/art-20044655.

Due to the various issues that the church and community face, there would be a need to implement more than one type of group. It is my viewpoint that a support group for substance abuse should be the first. A group such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous would be of great value to this community. Many of the other problems that the church faces are due to substance abuse. I am not justifying behavior such as sexual molestation or domestic violence, but the perpetrators are usually people who are substance abusers.

Such a group may be welcomed in the area because a former group that was sponsored by a neighboring church no longer meets. That group was sponsored by a Native American church, and most of the people attending were Native Americans. For some reason, African Americans and Caucasians would not attend the meetings. Piney Grove is a much larger church, and four ethnic groups usually take advantage of the services and outreach that we offer. African Americans, Caucasians, Native Americans, and Latinos have all found refuge in the church during times of need, struggles, and natural disasters. Piney Grove is known as the "community church," and that is the place where others (churched and non-churched) come to seek help and assistance. Therefore, the response from the community may be very strong and enough to begin at least one support group. Eventually, I would like to have a support group for victims of sexual molestation, victims of domestic violence, and even the perpetrators. I believe that most people in the church and community could benefit from such groups.

I do recognize that there will probably be some opposition to such a center in the church. First, some of the perpetrators and their supporters are still strong leaders in the community and church. My transparency already unnerves them, but we have never had

any confrontations. That being said, I have sensed a certain level of cautiousness when having discussions with me. I sensed this when I first shared this vision in meetings or visioning sessions, and even when it was touched upon in sermons. I have always been clear that such a center will not be about persecuting people, but about finding deliverance and healing for the perpetrators, as well as the victims. Even more so, the goal would be to stop the cycle and become intentional about having a healthier church context that can truly be a beacon of hope and light. I find it essential to be clear that the man sitting at the pool of Bethesda is indicative of the victims and perpetrators. As I have built relationships in the church with victims and former victims, perpetrators, former perpetrators, and alleged perpetrators, I have found that many do not want to be in the state that they are living in. Fear, shame, and guilt have kept them from moving towards healing. They are not mentally and emotionally able to move from their place of complacency to find deliverance and healing. It reminds me of the story of the disabled man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-9. Here is the story:

> After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
> Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.
> **5** One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.' Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk (NRSVA).

As this ministry project was developed, we began with meeting the people where they were at that time so that those in need, who volunteered to be participants, first felt moved to seek healing, second gain strength to call out to Jesus, and third, have faith to take up their mats and walk. While some of the older members of the church were very

adamant that this “old dirt” not be stirred up, there was and still is a great desire from many of the middle-aged and young adults to be delivered from the generational dysfunction. They shared that they immediately wanted to move to action strategies like support groups and church focused counseling. They had to be taught the importance of first learning how to discern and identify generational dysfunction. They had to understand the impact of the history of Black folks in this country, and more importantly, in their own community, and how slavery, the post-slavery era, and Jim Crow days affected the way that their ancestors thought and lived. They were also informed that the power that they must make a change may not have always been in place for their foreparents. With the founding of HBCUs and the opportunity to become educated, the more recent generations have more resources to live and do better. Such is the crux of this project because they do not have to live the way their ancestors lived. They do not have to tolerate the abuse that their ancestors tolerated. Sermons and pre-project discussion sessions strengthened them to want to walk out of victimization into a state of empowerment. They had to believe that change could happen if they just stepped out on faith.

As I looked at how the issues in my context related to the issues in my own autobiography, I had to acknowledge that I have seen the same thing not only in my family, but my home church. I grew up in an environment where being a victim was normalized, especially for women and children. That has not changed, and I only wish that I could do this project in the church where I received my Christian foundation. One of my goals is to share this work with other churches and communities, so that healing can be widespread.

As we will see in the Biblical Foundations, generational curses may start small, but as they grow from one generation to another, they become larger and larger, stronger and stronger, and cause more and more brokenness. The biblical family that I related this project to is the family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and his brothers. The dysfunction of the family started with the Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar's issue that produced Ishmael. It continued with Isaac's sons – Esau and Jacob. Due to the deception of Jacob and Rebecca, the family unit was divided as the brothers became enemies, and Jacob had to leave. Jacob traveled straight into the land of his uncle, Laban, to experience even more dysfunction, as he was tricked into marrying Leah instead of his beloved Rachel. Then he had a favorite in Joseph, the first son of Rachel. This perpetuated a fallout that created a level of hate being developed against Joseph to the extent that his brothers wanted him to die. The story continued with all that Joseph endured while he was separated from his family, which included being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, wrongfully imprisoned, and ultimately being delivered from captivity and becoming a great leader who would offer refuge, food, and deliverance to his own family. The forgiveness that took place was the true beginning of healing from generations of deception, jealousy, sexual abuse, and other dysfunctions. Joseph's forgiveness was critical, but it was also predicated on his brothers' humility. While certainly Joseph would have forgiven them regardless, their regrets and gratitude for his forgiveness also played a role.

In my own story, there is forgiveness on my part, but there is no acknowledgement or taking of responsibility on the part of my abuser and those who knew; even other victims do not want to discuss the violation. Because parents want to

have the “perfect” family, they want to only recognize the good and not the bad. They encourage their children to “get over” being wronged by a sibling or other family member. Many times, this leaves the victim in a position to have to “grin and bear” the behavior of their abuser. Just like so many wives, who “grin and bear” being domestically abused, while living with their abusers. The same is in the context. For generations, the abused women and children have not only been expected to “grin and bear” the abuse, but they have also been expected to cover up for their abusers. For generations, wives and children have heralded their abusers as good husbands and fathers. Even after their oppressors have passed away, they feel pressured to continue the façade that their home was a happy one and that the oppressor was a good, upstanding person who loved his family and showed that love in every way. One of the staunch beliefs in the community is that when someone passes away, they are to be celebrated as an “unsung hero” and elevated on every level and in every manner.

Conclusion

When I began serving in this context, I was shocked at how much the context mirrored my own life and the life of the church context where I grew up, although I was almost 100 miles away from home. That made this doctoral work even more personal. That is the key to my spiritual autobiography and contextual analysis, intersecting and energizing this ministry focus. As the spiritual leader of Piney Grove, I have been blessed to build strong relationships with the members that have allowed me to become a confidante and pastoral counselor. Because of this, I know a great deal more about the issues in the context than many members realize. I have heard the anguish, seen the tears,

and felt the brokenness that radiates through beautiful Sunday morning outfits, laughter, joking, and family reunions. In essence, I know the pain in its very raw form, and I see the need to come out of denial and learn how to discern and identify generational dysfunctional behavior. I also see the need to move to the next step after this project and promote a Center that will provide AA/NA Meetings, Counseling, and support groups. Such a Center would not only be opened to the church members, but also to the entire community. The problem is community-wide, so the resolution must be the same.

As I transitioned into my Biblical Foundation, we will look at Genesis 37:1-4. Again, here we will see the generational dysfunctional behavior of the family of Abraham and the three generations that followed. My research will share how dysfunctional behavior has been able to infiltrate families, communities, and even racial groups. The major question that is unspoken, but very prevalent, is whether such behavior would change if the oppressors and/or the oppressed knew how to discern and identify it as dysfunctional. Is the lack of knowledge or ability to recognize and discern dysfunctional behavior the real issue? This research will lift a profound, "Yes!" to that question, because the members of Piney Grove and indeed my own family lived with such behavior. After all, we did not understand how to discern or identify it, let alone address it. This doctoral project will look at how dysfunctional behavior has been discerned and addressed by our ancestors who founded Historically Black Colleges and Universities. It will show the effects of the Minjung Theology and how Koreans address dysfunction, by calling out the sins of the oppressors and giving a voice to the oppressed. Further, it will show how effective the discipline of the psychology of the family can be when learning how to identify the signs of familial dysfunction, while becoming stronger in addressing

them. Like the members of the context, I believe that the healing process in my own family can also begin with us all learning how to discern dysfunctional behavior. Because I know all of the people concerned, I also know their hearts and I do not believe that anyone wants to live in dysfunction and yet we do, because we feel as if we have no other choice. This work will give us the first foundational phase in successfully addressing the problem of generational familial dysfunction.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

John Wesley is credited with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral or Methodist Quadrilateral and indicates that there are four sources by which we base our understanding of our faith upon, which are scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. "Wesley believed, first of all, that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in "scripture" as the sole foundation.[1] With scripture as the foundation of theology, the study, exegesis, and hermeneutics of most, if not all, projects must begin with a scriptural passage. In this particular case, the problem was that "the members of Piney Grove wrestle with generational familial dysfunction." The hypothesis was, "If the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members to identify the same."

A biblical passage, where we first see generational familial dysfunction, is seen in Genesis 37:1-4,

> Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan.
> **2**This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was
> shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and
> Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.
> **3**Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the
> son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. **4**But when his

[1] Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley," Wesley Center for Applied Theology," March 17, 2023, https://wtsociety.com/files/wts_journal/WTJ%2045-2.pdf.

> brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him (NRSVA).

In verse three, yet another son is born to the lineage of Abraham, who will be favored by his father and hated by his brothers. This is classic dysfunction that goes far beyond what had occurred in the former generations of the family. The passage shares that Jacob loved Joseph because he was born in Jacob's old age. Let's note that Jacob had another son by Rachel after Joseph, Benjamin. Therefore, we see that Jacob's love for Joseph was not just because Jacob was an elderly man when Joseph was born, because Benjamin was born when Jacob was even older. A logical reason could be Jacob's love for Rachel above all the other mothers. Perhaps, he loved Joseph so much because he was an answer to Rachel's prayers for a child. He showed evidence of his favor when he gifted Joseph the "coat of many colors," which enraged the brothers even more because that was the tangible evidence that their father had a favorite.

Hypothesis and Context

Let us review the hypothesis and its applicability. Again, the hypothesis was, "If the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members to identify the same." First, let us look at the need for this hypothesis in our context and my life. Piney Grove is uniquely known for being a strong family church, because there are a lot of intermarriages in the church. The generations up until around 1980 were established by brothers and sisters of one family marrying the brothers and sisters of another family. That actually has caused the majority of the current membership to all be siblings or first and second cousins. Only two families in the church are not a part of this interlocking group.

Again, the most prominent strength of the context is that it is a family-oriented church. Because everyone in the church is related by blood or marriage, they tend to come together in times of loss and need. This strength is an interesting one because, at the same time, many of the family dynamics are dysfunctional and erratic. This behavior has not only caused rifts in the family structures but also in the church context. The second strength is that while some churches do not have many children, Piney Grove is blessed to have had many children from one generation to the next. The church has a genetic heritage of multiple births. Most families have at least one set of twins or triplets. Currently, the church has more than fifty children between the ages of zero and eighteen years old.

Likewise, the weaknesses of the context are related to the interesting family structure of the church, wherein everyone is related in some manner. There is a strong issue with addiction from alcohol to drugs to gambling. These addictions have weakened and even destroyed some families. They are the triggers to domestic violence in practically every generation, and the saddest part is that it seems as if the violence is accepted. Sexual molestation of children is passed from generation to generation. Teen and unwed pregnancies are also prevalent from generation to generation. It seems that the families in the context are experiencing generational curses, and that seems to be the same with the characters of our biblical passage, Joseph, and his brothers.

> A generational curse is believed to be passed down from one generation to another due to rebellion against God. If your family line is marked by divorce, incest, poverty, anger or other ungodly patterns, you're likely under a generational curse. The Bible says that these curses are tied to choices. Deuteronomy 30:19 states that we can either choose life and blessings or death and cursing. Our families have the greatest influence on our development, including the development of our patterns of sin. Some people even assert that family or generational curses are passed down

> along generational lines. This belief comes from Old Testament passages which say that God 'punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation' (Exodus 34:7). Whether or not families inherit spiritual curses, it is obvious that patterns of sin are passed down through families. Everyone sins; but just as culture, ethnicity, and gender steer or patterns of sin in particular directions, so do our families. We inherit many traits and preferences from our parents that aren't always a positive influence on ourselves or others. When we acquire a sinful habit or belief that negatively affects our lives or those around us, this is known as a generational curse. It is the shadow side of behavior passed down through the generations but is it possible to break this cycle of suffering?[2]
>
> Biblical exegesis may be defined as 'the careful historical, literary, and theological analysis and explanation of a text.'[3]
>
> As we exegete and take a closer look at Genesis 45:3-7, we find that Genesis' Hebrew name is the same as its first word *Bereshit* (In the beginning). Genesis is an account of the creation of the world, the early history of humanity, and of Israel's ancestors and the origins of the Jewish people. The name *Genesis* is from the Latin Vulgate, in turn borrowed or transliterated from Greek, meaning 'origin.'[4]

Moses is believed to be the writer, although some sources say the book was written after Moses' death. Genesis 37:1-4 was chosen because of the mere fact that Joseph was born, and that Rachel, who had been "barren" for so long, was finally able to bear a child, and that brought joy to Jacob that none of the other children's births brought. It seems as if Joseph's issues with his brothers affected what God had commissioned the family of Jacob to do. After having to flee from his home and escape being murdered by his brother Esau, whom he had deceived, Jacob goes to his uncle, Laban's land, and is

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[2] Lynn Holzinger, "Breaking Off Generational Curses and the Meaning of Exodus 20:5," fathersheartforus.com.

[3] Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 23.

[4] David M. Carr, *Genesis*, in Eerdmans of the Bible, eds. David Noel Freedman and Allen C. Myers (Amsterdam: University Press, 2000), 491.

favored by falling in love with Laban's younger daughter, Rachel. Laban promised him that he could have Rachel if he worked seven years, but Laban then deceived Jacob and tricked him into lying down with the older sister, Leah. Laban's response to Jacob's rage at being deceived is to tell Jacob that he must work seven more years in order to have Rachel (Genesis 29:16-28). Jacob and Rachel's union was a "fairytale" one, but it had a harsh reality, because while Leah could bear many children, Rachel's womb was barren for a long time. Rachel's inability to bear children was a sore spot in the relationship that Jacob had worked 14 years to establish. In Genesis 30:1-2,

> When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or I shall die!' **2** Jacob became very angry with Rachel and said, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?' (NRSVA).

"Jealous of her sister, Rachel gave Jacob her servant Bilhah as a wife. By ancient custom, Bilhah's children would be credited to Rachel. Bilhah bore children to Jacob, causing Leah to give her servant Zilpah to Jacob, who had children with her."[5]

One can only imagine the jealousy of the older brothers when Joseph came along and was so beloved by their father. One may even ask the rhetorical question of how they could not be jealous when everyone in the land knew that Jacob did not love Leah, or the maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah, all of whom had given Jacob children before the birth of Joseph. More questions arise regarding how this must have made not only the women feel (especially Leah), but also how it must have made their children feel. Thus, the generational familial dysfunction infiltrates another generation, even though it is not identified as such. Is it not identified as such because no one knew how to discern and

[5] Jack Zavada, "Meet Rachel – Favored Wife of Jacob," 2022, https://www.learnreligions.com/rachel-favored-wife-of-jacob-701193.

identify dysfunction? That question reflects back upon the problem statement of this paper.

This issue did not start with Joseph and his dysfunctional relationship with his brothers. Instead, we can see dysfunctional issues of jealousy and unhealthy competition in the earlier relationships between Isaac and Ishmael and then again between Jacob and Esau. This Biblical Foundations chapter looks at the hypothesis stated above, how it relates to the biblical passage, and ultimately how it relates to and will strengthen the context of Piney Grove and other Black Churches, both urban and rural.

Again, the generational familial dysfunction did not start with the birth of Joseph, and jealousy was a strong source of the dysfunction. The family of Abraham had a long history of familial dysfunction, and more specifically, the story of Joseph and his brothers does not start in Genesis 37. Again, the darkness of Abraham's lineage did not start with the discord between these brothers but had been going on for generations. The Bible tells us that there were some issues between brothers since the first offspring, Cain and Abel, that ended with Cain killing Abel. The issues between brothers continued between Joseph's grandfather, Isaac, and his brother Ishmael. In Genesis 12, Abraham's story is the beginning of this particular generational curse of dysfunction between brothers. Looking at some selected verses from Genesis 21 as we look at the historical context of our passage:

> The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. **2**Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. **3**Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. **4**And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. **5**Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him (Genesis 21:1-5, NRSVA).

> **8**The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. **9**But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. **10**So she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.' **11**The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. **12**But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you. **13**As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.' **14**So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba (Genesis 21:8-14, NRSVA).

> **17**And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. **18**Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.' **19**Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. **20**God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. **21**He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt (Genesis 21:17-14) (NRSVA).

Here is evidence that Isaac and Ishmael were never allowed to build a solid brotherly relationship because of Abraham and Sarah's lies, jealousy, and bad choices. Hagar was a servant, so she did not have much choice in the matter. Instead, she had to lie with Abraham and bear his first son, as Sarah commanded. Then, she and Ishmael endured being sent away when there was no more use for them.

This is not where the dysfunction ended, for in Genesis 27, there is a huge, seemingly unforgivable wedge between Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau – Jacob being the father of Joseph. This is recorded in selected verses from Genesis 25 and 27,

> **27**When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. **28**Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. **29**Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. **30**Esau

said to Jacob, ‘Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!’ (Therefore he was called Edom.) **31**Jacob said, ‘First sell me your birthright.’ **32**Esau said, ‘I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?’ **33**Jacob said, ‘Swear to me first.’ So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. **34**Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright (Genesis 25:27-34, NRSVA).

19Jacob said to his father, ‘I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.’ **20**But Isaac said to his son, ‘How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?’ He answered, ‘Because the LORD your God granted me success.’ **21**Then Isaac said to Jacob, ‘Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.’ **22**So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, ‘The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.’ **23**He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him. (Genesis 27:19-23) (NRSVA).

30As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. **31**He also prepared savoury food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, ‘Let my father sit up and eat of his son’s game, so that you may bless me.’ **32**His father Isaac said to him, ‘Who are you?’ He answered, ‘I am your firstborn son, Esau.’ **33**Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, ‘Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and blessed he shall be!’ **34**When Esau heard his father’s words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me, me also, father!’ **35**But he said, ‘Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing’(Genesis 27:30-35, NRSVA).

41Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob’ (Genesis 27:41, NRSVA).

These passages are shared to show that for generations, the descendants of Abraham had been at discord with brother against brother. Also, it is interesting to see that these issues were somewhat instigated by the mothers, Sarah and Rebekah. While Jacob’s wife, Rachel, died young in childbirth, her sister Leah may have had some jealousy against the younger sons of Jacob, who were born to her sister, his beloved

Rachel. Further, as stated above, Rachel dealt with her own jealousy of her sister Leah, who could have children. This jealousy spurred her on to give her servant Bilhah to Jacob so she could conceive and birth babies, who would be credited to Rachel.

In my family, there have been issues of jealousy that have impacted relationships and the harmony of the family, which has ended in dysfunctional behavior being able to seep into the midst. I understand Rachel's plight; I suffered four miscarriages, while my sisters and cousins could easily give birth to healthy babies. While I was very supportive of these children, I still had to deal with my own feelings of loss, pain, and even resentment, especially when I felt like the home that my husband and I had established was the most perfect home in the family for God to gift with a baby. The familial dysfunction was never identified or discussed, but it should have been.

Back to the scripture, disregarding the insight about the mothers' interference, this is very much like the church context, because there are generations of siblings that have had issues that resulted in family discord and dysfunction, as well as most likely perpetuated behavior such as alcoholism, addiction, domestic violence, sexual molestation and more because the family life was not healthy and whole.

In the case of Joseph and his brothers, the dysfunctional behavior that started at his birth impacted his entire life. In much of Genesis Chapters 37-45, Joseph goes from being threatened with death, thrown into a pit, and sold by his brothers. Then he rises and falls in power from a high position in Potiphar's house to the depths of a prison and ultimately back to a high position in Pharaoh's government. His life was tumultuous but blessed and highly favored. Eventually, the dysfunction that separated him from his father, Jacob, would evolve full circle and bring him back before his brothers again.

While this was not an easy journey, it is evidence that God can restore dysfunctional relationships if one is in the right relationship with Him.

Fast forward to Genesis 45 and the restoration of Jacob's family, as one examines verses 3 and 4, one can see the tone for reconciliation being set. In Genesis 45:3, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" His brothers were not able to answer him because they were terrified by his presence. In verse 4, Joseph spoke to his brothers and told them to come closer to him. When they came closer, he told them that he was their brother Joseph, whom they sold into Egypt. At this time, Joseph did not minimize his brother's sin. Joseph demonstrated that forgiveness does not call for one to minimize sin, but it can be neutralized.[6]

The brothers cringed in fear, for they knew what they had done to Joseph, and they also knew that he was powerful enough to punish them greatly for their actions. David Guzik, the writer of the *Enduring Bible Commentary*, likens their fear to that of the Jewish people when they realize the true identity of Jesus. He quotes Zechariah 12:10, "And I will pour on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."[7] Certainly, when one thinks about the fear that the persecutors of Jesus will feel when they find out that indeed, he is the Messiah, one can feel the fear of God. Was that what Joseph's brothers were feeling? It behooves us to pause for a moment and stand

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[6] Bible.org, "Genesis: From Paradise," Bible.org, https://Bible.org/series/genesis-paradise-patriarch.

[7] David Guzik, "Genesis 45," *Enduring Word Bible Commentary*, https://enduringword.com/Bible-commentary/genesis-45/.

still in that brief time between when the brothers learned of Joseph's identity and when they learned of his forgiveness, because that is the place where many people find themselves at some time or another. It is in that critical moment in time that most people find themselves in one of three places: coping, ascending, or spiraling. The part that is found most interesting is that, upon reflection, one usually seems to find a way to blame another party for their choice. Here in the passage, it may seem to Joseph's brothers that he has their future in his hands. He is the one with the power, and therefore, he will determine their demise or survival. Certain questions arise about the brothers and not Joseph. "Are they truly repentant or afraid?" "What would have happened if they had become hostile and told Joseph that he was supposed to be dead or enslaved?' "What would have happened if they had refused to bring their father to Joseph, fearing Jacob's anger towards them?" These questions should be reflected upon first, because in them we see that the matter was not totally out of the hands of the brothers. So many times, people feel as if their destinies are in the hands of another. Well, here the brothers, like most people, must take ownership for their wrong, repent from it, and humble themselves before Joseph. That is what is needed to make this broken relationship whole again and help this family to begin to heal from the dysfunction.

Now, looking at this critical moment from Joseph's point of view, it is clear that he could have justifiably been angry and unforgiving of his brothers. He could have banished them to prison or even called for their deaths. He had every right to be unforgiving of them and sufficient power to rain down his wrath upon them. He could have tricked them into bringing his beloved father, Jacob, and brother, Benjamin, to him and then called upon their punishment. Again, he definitely had enough power and

authority to do so. But, stronger than power and authority, Joseph had a relationship with God that had instilled in him love and not hate, forgiveness and not vengeance, and grace and mercy, not justice. Yes, in that critical moment when one pauses to see what both sides will do is very important, because it is the moment that dictates where not only these brothers will go from this place, but where future generations will go as well.

Before going further, comparing this same moment in time to the context is important. As one researches, observes, and gains feedback from the contextual associates, one finds that they too had these same moments in time when they found themselves at a crossroad and the only way that they found to endure the pain was going the wrong direction. They, too, had many opportunities to ask forgiveness and repent, but due to pride, stubbornness, and meanness, they failed to do so. They also had the opportunity to be forgiving and extend grace and mercy to their blood sister and/or brother, but refused to do so. Their failure to go in the right direction at a critical moment caused them to become separated from each other. Many do not speak to each other, even if it is a full-blooded sibling, a parent/child, or a first cousin. They can only see their side of the situation, and from their perspective, all of the opportunities to bring about healing were in the hands of the other person.

A common plight between siblings is becoming angry and stop speaking to each other at the death of the last parent. Most of the families in the church own their own land and family homesteads. The families are also large, with anywhere from seven to twenty-one children, all adults with their own homes and property. When the final parent transitions, it does not matter what condition the home is in or if anyone actually needs to live in it; that homestead becomes the subject of contention. They begin to disagree and

argue over who should have control and authority over the parents' property. They refuse to seek legal recourse or sell the property and split the proceeds. In most cases, the parents did not have Last Wills and Testaments to distribute the property. These periods of no communication can last for years, even generations. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren continue the practice of not speaking, even in church. While the church is family-oriented, you never know who is not speaking to whom. In the meantime, the property is deteriorating due to a lack of use and upkeep. They barely pay the taxes, and usually that is done by one or two of the heirs. Like in the story of Joseph, there is always one who would like to have peace, and like the story of Joseph, the real root of the family issues is grounded in jealousy, old wounds, and unresolved issues from prior generations.

In the context, observations have revealed that some families have made strong and sometimes successful attempts at reconciliation. There have been incidences of a brother or sister extending the olive branch and inviting all of the siblings to gather and fellowship over a meal. These gatherings have also included the next two to three generations, and at the end of the meal those in attendance have vowed to be intentional about strengthening their broken relationships. In other incidences, just two siblings have sat down together and hash out their issues, each taken responsibility for the roles that they played, and then made vows to each other to not only reconcile their relationship, but to encourage reconciliation among other members of the family. As love is taught and preached often, the Holy Spirit is moving God's people to let go of the past hurt, anger, and betrayal, and practice more love and forgiveness.

While it would be an exaggeration to share that these first steps to healing always end all "lovey dovey," one can applaud the efforts of family members to reach out to one

another and talk through their issues. One can also celebrate that these efforts have not gone unnoticed by the younger members of the family, who desire unity between their parents and grandparents.

Likewise, there are family members who are stubborn and refuse to reconcile. There are some who even display feelings of hate for another family member, such as the hate that Joseph's brothers displayed for him. This hate even stems from earlier generations, wherein foreparents did not get along, and they passed that dysfunction down to their children. One thing that such situations have shown many of the younger parents in this context is that it is not good to discuss adult issues in front of children. When that happens, the risk of contaminating the minds of the children with hate is high, and such hate may not only be with that child, but with the generations to come.

This is why this project is so very important as a first step to eradicating generational family dysfunction in this context. Too many people have ill will against others, but they do not even know why they do. By learning how to discern and identify dysfunctional behavior, the generations of today and tomorrow will be able to see the evidence of dysfunction, deal with it, and "nip it in the bud."

In applying the biblical passage of Genesis 37, we see that the common elements were joy for Jacob, and jealousy for Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah, and maybe even gloating from Rachel. As the biblical passage of Genesis 45 is applied, it is seen that the key common element is "forgiveness," which goes a long way and is usually the first step in healing. In keeping with the hypothesis, it is important to point out that when there is a lack of healing, dysfunctional family units can breed other uncanny behavior, such as alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence, infidelity, and sexual molestation, to name

a few. All of this exists in this context, and it is destroying every generation. God is calling the church to become equipped to address these issues, and that is the premise of the project of this writer. Understanding that healing takes time, just like it took time for the families to get to this state. Moreover, the church can play a strong and effective role in bringing about needed wholeness.

As one looks at the hypothesis, "If the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members identify it," the question becomes, "How can the church bring about restoration to the families in this context and community the same way that the Lord did between Joseph and his brothers?"

As we respond to generational curses, we must be positive with great hope that they can be broken.

> Set theology aside for a moment. Common sense tells us that behavior and attitude problems tend to run in families. Just like physical characteristics of height, weight, hair color, and complexion. In the same way, certain types of sin can pass from generation to generation. This is particularly true of addictive behaviors such as alcoholism. Similarly, physical and sexual abuse might become ingrained in the psychological legacy of certain families. However, none of this should be viewed in terms of an irreversible, 'curse.' Spiritual deliverance is available to everyone who sincerely calls upon the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13). And there are many sources of professional assistance for those who need practical help – pastors, therapists, counselors, and doctors.[8]

These curses or family issues can be broken, and healing can come forth for those who have been scarred and are prone to disruptive behavior due to such family issues. As this article states, God Himself promises in Romans 10:13 that He will deliver us. God

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[8] Focus on the Family, "Understanding Generational Curse of Exodus 34:7," Focus on the Family, 2012, https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-qa/understanding-the-generational-curse-of-exodus-347/.

has gifted and anointed people who have then gone on to receive the proper education and skills to become resources to help those who are struggling. Some of these people are pastors, therapists, doctors, counselors, and spiritual advisors. These resources are available, even in the more rural areas, and when the church cannot offer services, then the leadership, both clergy and lay, needs to be equipped to share resources.

What a marvelous attitude Joseph exhibited as we hear him continue to converse with his brothers in Genesis 45:5-7.

> **5**And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. **6**For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. **7**God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors (NRSVA).

Truthfully, Joseph's entire time away from his family had not been a bed of roses, but he rose above it all. Ironically, it was his very gift of being a dreamer and an interpreter of his dreams that eventually elevated him to this position of power. And yet, he was not bitter and did not seek punishment for his brothers. Instead, he lightens their own fear, guilt, and shame and said this was all a part of God's plan.

Conclusion

Let us first return to our hypothesis statement again, "If the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members identify the same." Perhaps if there were resources available to Abraham and his descendants, the patriarchal stories of Genesis would be different. Let us think about the "what ifs." What if there was pastoral counseling for Abraham and Sarah as they dealt with what we commonly know today as infertility, and

then such infertility turned into a faith walk upon hearing from God? Would Sarah have been so quick to seek surrogacy through Hagar? And if she did, would she have understood the importance of being kind and receptive to Ishmael, who, in fact, was her idea? Would she have welcomed him and encouraged a healthy relationship between him and his brother, Isaac? Or, what if Rebekah would have had resources available to help her not only learn to love both of her sons, Jacob and Esau, for their differences, but to understand the detriment of having Jacob deceive his father? What does such an action say about her preference for Jacob, as well as her lack of love and respect for Isaac in his old age? Additionally, what if Jacob understood that by showing his profound love for Joseph, it would only foster jealousy and hate among the brothers? Would family counseling have helped? These are the questions to be pondered because they could have been possibly addressed through pastoral care, counseling, or therapy.

Of course, these resources were not available in biblical days, but these and much more are available today to help break the generational curses and to also encourage families to talk out their feelings, seek resolutions, and receive help when necessary. However, even in this twenty-first century, those "what ifs" cannot be addressed until the oppressors and the oppressed are able to discern and identify abnormal behavior. The context of Piney Grove is unique because although it is rural, it has a high level of educated people, and some of them have educational backgrounds and experiences in counseling. Yet, they do not see the need or the way to help each other. The answer remains a glaring, "Why?" Perhaps, the family drama, discord, dysfunction, and disasters have made it too painful to address. If so, there are resources to break things down into smaller portions where people can chew on issues in "bite-sized" forms instead of dealing

with everything at once. What we have found is that the answer is not in a bottle, a needle, crack cocaine, rock or powder, unhinged anger that results in domestic violence, incest, or sexual molestation. All of these have hurt and destroyed families, and today's generation is still paying the cost for the "curses." In fact, in our context, some of these ailments are still eating away at family units. The answer is found in a right relationship with God, which births love and forgiveness, such as we see in Joseph.

This project can definitely be one that plants the seed for there to be more Josephs. What if Joseph had not been a man of God, who extended forgiveness instead of judgment? Some would say that the answer is simple. His family would have been turned away. But look even deeper and see that, additionally, a spiraling trend could have been set that would have destroyed the twelve nations of Israel and those that descended from them. The promise that God gave Abraham while he was without children that he would be the Father of many nations would possibly not have been realized to the extent that the root of Jesse would not have brought forth the House of David, from which Jesus Christ Himself descended. Forgiveness is powerful, and it changes the hearts of people to such a degree that they want their relationships to be healed. That is what is needed in the context of the church, and that is what the leadership will learn in the project, that is how to encourage others to want to reconcile and make their families whole again. The body of Christ in general and the Black Church in particular must seek means of reconciliation and ways to overcome dysfunctional behavior that has been destructive for centuries. Once God's people know how to discern such behavior and the language to use to encourage reconciliation and peace, then they can begin to direct those in turmoil to seek resources that will help them overcome some of the issues that they face. Those who are

leaders in the church, clergy and lay, usually desire peace and reconciliation, but the issue is that they are not properly equipped to even discern and articulate the foundational issues, let alone address them. Dysfunction after generations can begin to look normal, and once that happens, no one has the ability or desire to step out of the comfort zone, even if that zone is hazardous for the future of the church and its families. For too long, the church in this context has not addressed these behaviors. It is apparent that such behavior is known and considered wrong, but it is also apparent that no one knows how to take the first step in making a change. The church is a hospital where all people should be able to go and find healing; however, healing cannot be realized when there is an inability to even make a diagnosis. This context desires to do better at addressing the real issues and the root of them. This project proved that with proper training, the church can become a true source of healing, refuge, and a bright beacon of light and hope. In the project, the leadership of the church, which covered every generation, was involved in a six-week workshop and Bible study series that equipped them with the knowledge and tools to discern and identify generational familial dysfunctional behavior. This project will be the catalyst for deliverance, healing, and change in the church and community.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

As this project addresses the history of generational family dysfunction in the Black community and church, this Historical Foundations inspired a deep look at the impact of the founding of Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the post-slavery era. That particular era is the beginning of the Reconstruction Era of 1865-1900. The founding of HBCUs is posited as the historical foundation for this project because access to education was instrumental in liberating people of African descent. The problem is that the members of Piney Grove wrestle with generational family dysfunction. The hypothesis is "if the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members identify the same."

Many authors jump right into how the Reconstruction Era was a time in history when the country was focused on integrating newly freed slaves into the workforce, politics, and society of America. However, much of the repercussions of slavery was magnified in the years immediately following the Civil War. With this taint on the life of Blacks that centuries of time have not erased, but magnified, this race of people is still fighting for social justice, equal pay, and the right to live in peace. In this context, we find that some of the members of the Piney Grove community are still searching for

peace in their own community. They are haunted by memories of injustices, abuse, and violence, some of it occurring in their own homes. They desire peace, but they do not know how to find it because the barriers were placed many years ago. The people in this context are the descendants of slaves, former slaves, and former sharecroppers. Their ancestors lived through not only slavery but also Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights movement. Scars from abuse and injustices had penetrated deeply into the lives of their ancestors, and by the time most of the members of this context were born, the damage was done. Some were born to parents who were using alcohol and then drugs to numb themselves to the pain. Some were born to parents who, the only way they knew how to express their feelings, was through abuse and violence, adultery, and betrayal of all kinds.

In the book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Joy DeGruy shares a story about a trip to a South African village of Onverwagt that she observed over 100 years after the Civil War. DeGruy states that the African women and men wore attire that was similar to the attire of the sharecroppers of the South. They acted like those whose self-esteem was low, and they were prone to not looking others in the eye. Their social problems were like those of the urban areas in America, and they dealt with problems that are like those in the context, such as drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, crime, and poverty. There was definitely a sense of guilt, shame, and hopelessness.[1]

While this is a scene from South Africa, it holds a great deal of resemblance to some of the people in this context. Even in the twenty-first century, there are still some who are bent, and yes, even broken, under the oppression that started in slavery. They

[1] Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Milwaukee, OR: Uptone Press, 2017), 47.

were not really emancipated during the Reconstruction Era, and this led them into a place of survival during the Jim Crow days and the Civil Rights Movement. Although some of these victims of this injustice were not even born during that time, they carry the burden of their ancestors on them like scars that refuse to completely heal. Instead of healing, the scars have become deeper and have left them in a state of existence that causes them to treat their family members the way that they had been treated, thus creating a generational dysfunction that permeates throughout the church and community.

This chapter revisits the days of Reconstruction and particularly the post slavery era – a time when former slaves were scattered and wandering for some place to call home. This is critical to understanding some of the issues that the foreparents, and even current members of Piney Grove, are still facing. Like the newly freed Blacks of the post-slavery era, instead of finding refuge or being able to reap the benefits of the forty acres and a mule promised, they were left with nothing and were vulnerable to more abuse and even death. This era left fathers feeling helpless to care for their families and reunite their grieving wives with children that were taken, or their grieving children with mothers that were sold away. These fathers and many mothers' feelings of hopelessness led them to alcohol to numb themselves, and they found release in lashing out violently against their innocent loved ones because they could not lash out at their oppressors. Also, like the natives of Overwagt, the ancestors of the African Americans were thrust into conditions that were unfamiliar and inescapable. Slavery caused stress that was disturbing, harmful, and traumatic, which also caused wounds on the psyche of its victims that even some still fester to this day.[2]

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[2] DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 51.

This chapter will also briefly look at the lasting effects of the trauma of the early days of the Reconstruction Era (post slavery) and how it is transmitted from one generation to another. It will also look at the direct relationship of the experience of Blacks in this era and what is still occurring in America, as well as how it resembles the context of Piney Grove today. More specifically, the topic of this chapter will be the founding of Historical Black Colleges and Universities and how they have made a positive impact on alleviating dysfunction in the Black family, church, and community.

Body

As we delve deeper into the historical era as it relates to this thesis and project, we must recognize that many bemoan the fact that slavery was common in the Bible, and because of this, some argue that the Lord condoned slavery. Although slavery was prevalent during biblical times, that does not mean that God condoned such dehumanization. The Bible does address the freeing of slaves. For example, in the Book of Philemon (the shortest in the Bible), we find Paul pleading for Onesimus' freedom and kindly asking the one who owned Onesimus, Philemon, to release him. Paul makes it clear that he could force the issue, but the liberation of Onesimus would be much more profound if Philemon gave him his freedom willingly.

> **8**For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, **9**yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love — and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. **10**I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment (Philemon 1:8-10, NRSVA).

As we look at the lasting effects of slavery, we must first look at the present and observe what is happening in the United States of America today. Many Black Americans

are still in bondage to the feeling of hopelessness that they will never realize the American dream, and therefore, they fail to take advantage of educational and vocational resources to improve their lives. Hopelessness can affect every area of our lives, including our general state of health. However, the church can make an impact on this state. As one study points out:

> Hopelessness – a state of despair characterized by a negative outlook towards the future and a belief in insurmountable challenges – is a risk factor for major depression, cardiovascular disease, and all-cause mortality among older adults. It is also an understudied consequence of discrimination. Older Blacks disproportionately report experiencing discrimination and, as a result, may be at greater risk of feeling hopeless. However, social and religious resources may protect against the adverse effects of discrimination. The current study examines whether social support, social engagement, religious attendance, and religiosity buffer the effects of self-reported everyday discrimination on hopelessness among a nationally representative sample of Blacks.[3]

Even with this definition, the question may still be asked, "How can the church play a role in decreasing or even alleviating hopelessness?" This question is magnified when it is considered that sometimes the church itself feels hopeless and instead of being a beacon of light and hope, it is a feeding ground for negativity, judgment, and hopelessness itself. In a study by Nguyen, Wang, Qin, and Hamler, the authors observe:

> Altogether, these findings support the literature on the detrimental effects of discrimination on the mental health of older African Americans and provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of church members in the lives of older African Americans. The study findings suggest that church relationships are effective stress coping resources for older African Americans dealing with discrimination. Given the importance and relevance of church members, initial clinical assessments should assess

[3] Uchechi A. Mitchell, Melissa Gutierrez-Hapheim, Ann W. Nguyen, and Madia Al-Almin, "Hopelessness Among Middle-Aged and Older Blacks: The Negative Impact of Discrimination and Protecting Power of Social and Religious Resources," 2020, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gove/33241123/.

> clients' level of religious involvement and relationships with church members.[4]

The effects on African Americans have evolved to such a degree that it is affecting the health of an entire race of people. However, through this article, it seems as if the church can be a sound place where hope can be found.

One of the most profound and effective ways to alleviate this state of hopelessness and helplessness has been the founding of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."[5] Pedagogy can deeply impact more than just what a student learns from books. It is the study of teaching methods and the science of teaching methods.[6] Studies show that students at HBCUs claim to feel valued, welcomed, and believed, thus giving them hope for future success. Teachers work toward a captive audience in their classroom settings to teach more than academics. They also teach pride, character, and etiquette, thereby preparing their students to not only excel academically but also socially.[7] Members of the context who attended an HBCU share experiences that support this study. They have stated that by attending an HBCU, they were empowered to overcome some of the dysfunction that they experienced during their upbringing, and that they felt comfortable "holding their own" in any environment. They attribute this to the

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[4] Ann W. Nguyen, Fei Wang, Weidi Qin, and Tyrone C. Hamler, "The Role of Church Support Networks," in *The Relationship between Discrimination and Psychiatric Disorders among Older African Americans,* 2021, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35757388/.

[5] David Forsythe, "Encyclopedia of Human Rights," Oxford Reference, 2009, https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195334029.001.0001/acref-9780195334029.

[6] Chris Watkins and Peter Mortimore, "Pedagogy: What do we Know?" *Understanding Pedagogy and its Impact on Learning,* ed. Peter Mortimore (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, 1999), 1-20.

[7] M. Christopher Brown II and T. Elon Dancy II, "Black Colleges across the Diaspora: Global Perspective on race and stratification in postsecondary education," (Leeds, England: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017) 151-169.

teaching that they received during their college experience – the awareness that they were somebody special.

I have always been encouraged and focused on education. In the context of my nuclear family, post-secondary education was a given, and the six children who were raised together by my grandparents have all excelled in academics. All have bachelor's degrees, and four of the six have terminal degrees in medicine, law, and psychology, and soon religion. Raised by poor folks who were former sharecroppers and uneducated, many of the children of the 60's and 70's were not given a choice when it came to attending school or pursuing higher education. In my case, the great-grandmother, grandparents, and mother who raised me, my siblings, and cousins were not all able to get an education. In fact, our grandfather could not read, write, or sign his name. But he knew that the liberty of his grandchildren would be found in education. Some of us attended predominantly white institutions, and some attended HBCUs. The choice was ours, and wherever we decided to attend college, we had the full support of three generations of family. Now we are parents who have been able to send our own children to college. Playing outside, socializing with friends, extracurricular activities, and sports were all appreciated, but the mantra in my home was "education is the key," and this was not debatable. Families like ours always appreciated the doors that HBCUs opened and the opportunities that such colleges and universities afforded them to be able to attend college, even when they had not excelled in high school. Many HBCU institutions were opened to working with students who struggled through high school and looked beyond their grades and standardized test scores when considering admission. They offered opportunities to be enrolled in the institution and take remedial courses if necessary to

catch up. This is still the case and greatly appreciated by not only my family but also the members of this context, who also want to offer their children the opportunity to attend an institution of higher learning. Without the existence of HBCUs, many members of the context would not have been able to attend college, and they could have possibly become victims of the dysfunctional behavior that they saw growing up. Instead, they learned about more than academics in these institutions. They were exposed to etiquette and the proper way to lead a household. Young men learned how to treat young women, and therefore, they do not treat their wives the way they saw their fathers treat their mothers. They learned other coping mechanisms to deal with stress and therefore did not succumb to alcohol or drugs to deal with life issues. They also learned how to be financially secure and invest their earnings in ways that would make them wealthier than their parents. This is why looking at the history of HBCUs is so important to this work, because both my family and the members of the context would be in bondage to ignorance if HBCUs were not there with open doors.

"HBCUs were established to provide more opportunities to African Americans and are largely responsible for establishing and expanding the African-American middle class"[8] "Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are institutions of higher education in the United States that were established before the Civil Rights of 1964 with of primarily service African Americans."[9] The first HBCUs were actually found before the Civil War.

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[8] Cache McClay, "The Story of Historically Black Colleges in the US," British Broadcasting Corporation, February 15, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47234239.

[9] Walter R. Allen, Joseph O. Jewell, Kimberly A. Griffin, and De'Sha S. Wolf, "Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Honoring the Past, Engaging the Present, Touching the Future," *Journal of Negro Educatio*n 76 (2007): 262-280.

> After the Civil War (1861-1865), HBCUs emerged to provide Black Americans the most basic of human rights – access to a full education. Prior to the Civil War, the education of Black Americans was prohibited in most Southern states and often discouraged in Northern states resulting in only a few Black schools being in exercise – Cheyney University (est. 1837), University of the District of Columbia (1851), Lincoln University (1854), and Wilberforce University (1856). Most of our nation's HBCUs were started by philanthropists and free Blacks; Southern states at the behest of the federal government; and government; and religious organizations such as the American Missionary Association (AMA) and the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church.[10]

Further, the need for Blacks to be educated was intentionally addressed by northern missionaries. Hampton Institute, Fisk University, Howard University, Atlanta, Talledega, Shaw, and other well-known Negro institutions of learning were direct outgrowths of the Civil War. In 1860 such institutions for the Black race were un-dreamed of; ten years later they had all been established and the need of Negro education generally recognized.[11]

Because each HBCU has much to offer and each is unique in its own way, I would love to be able to highlight all of them. However, this work does not allow that opportunity; so, this chapter will only look at four of the HBCUs that flourished to the level of being known as "Ivy League" institutions of higher learning by many. First is Howard University, which is located in the nation's capital, Washington, DC. It is a private, federally chartered school that was chartered in 1867, right at the beginning of the Reconstruction Era.

> The University charter as enacted by Congress and subsequently approved by President Andrew Johnson on March 2, 1867, designated Howard University as 'a University for the education of youth in the liberal arts and sciences.' The Freedmen's Bureau provided most of the early

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[10] HBCU First, "A History of Historically Black Colleges and Universities," https://hbcu first.com/resources/hbcu-history-timeline.

[11] L. P. Jackson, "The Origin of Hampton University," *The Journal of Negro History* 2 (1925).

> financial support of the University. In 1879, Congress approved a special appropriation for the University. The charter was amended in 1928 to authorize an annual federal appropriation for construction, development, improvement, and maintenance of the University.[12]

General Oliver O. Howard, a Civil War hero, was the founder of the University, and he was also the commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. Interestingly enough, General Howard started Howard as a seminary to educate Black clergymen.[13] This is particularly pertinent to the context of this chapter because this paper is focused on the work of the church and its leadership in which the clergy person is at the helm, alleviating dysfunctional behavior in the Black family. Some outstanding questions that will remain rhetorical are: Did General Howard think beyond the pulpit when looking at the effect that educated clergy could have on the Black community? Did he look at the state of the Black families that had gone through centuries of being brutalized and separated, and think that an educated leader of their church could not only preach God, but also preach liberty? Was it his desire that the families be made whole with education, beginning with the clergy in the community? Again, these are rhetorical questions, and the answers most likely lie in the world beyond, the one General Howard transitioned to and where he now takes his rest from this world. Notwithstanding these questions, which were included for thought only, Howard University quickly became much more than a seminary.

> [T]he establishment of Howard University on March 1, 1867, constitutes one of the most interesting developments in history of American colleges and universities. On November 10, 1866, a proposal was made to establish

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[12] Howard University, "Brief History of Howard University," Howard University Archives, 2009, https://howard.edu/explore/history.htm.

[13] Howard University, "Brief History of Howard University," Howard University Archives, 2009, https://howard.edu/explore/history.htm.

> a theological seminary for the training of 'preachers (colored) with a view to service among the freedmen.'[14]

Between the November 1866 meeting and the actual establishment of Howard in March 1867, the school's purpose was extended from being a theological seminary to a liberal arts college and educational institute for Blacks. With the emancipation of 4,000,000 slaves and the prospect of over 400,000 freedmen who were mostly illiterate, there was much opposition to Howard having this new focus. Many could not even envision such.[15] The inherent inferiority view caused most Whites in the North to exclude Blacks from attending the public schools. It was viewed that Negroes were incapable of learning on the lowest level, less more on attending a college. Most Negroes accepted that this was the hand they had been dealt and they resorted to attending Sabbath or church schools to learn basic reading. These schools were located in the larger cities of the North, such as New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. In the South, some Negroes attended private schools in cities such as Charleston and Savannah.[16]

The plans for Howard quickly changed, as a need for more than theology and even more than liberal arts emerged. Howard would quickly become an institution that offered bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and professional degrees, including a degree in medicine.

> On April 13, 1868, the plan (to approve a School of Medicine) was approved. But within less than a month, on May 4. 1868, Dr. H. Barber, a member of the faculty resigned and Dr. S. Read Ward a member of the faculty failed reelection. Finally, the faculty was completed by the election of Dr. L. C. Loomis, as Professor of Physiology and Microscopy and by

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[14] Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years 1867-1967* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1969), 3.

[15] Logan, *Howard University,* 4.

[16] Logan, *Howard University,* 8.

> the election of Dr. A. T. Augusta as demonstrator of Anatomy. This was on September 21, 1868. With five teachers, therefore, at 5 p.m. Monday evening, November 9, 1868, the 'Medical Department' of Howard University opened for instruction.[17]

Although the school of medicine plans were met with opposition, and it took great effort to get an approved faculty and the support of the federal government and accrediting committee, by 1868, Howard University was an institution of higher learning that was offering Blacks the opportunity for a full education. Howard has many distinguished alumni, including a close member of my family and a current student in the School of Law who is a member of Piney Grove. Additionally, Howard is the alma mater of Vice President Kamala Harris, actresses Phylicia Allen Raschad and Debbie Allen (who are sisters), Bishop Vashti Murphy, and many more outstanding actors, clergy, lawyers, doctors, educators, and tradesmen.

Another outstanding HBCU that opened doors and provided opportunities for thousands of Blacks and others who desired to attend college was Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia. First, here is a brief history of Hampton, Virginia:

> In the history of this state, here arose, long ago unnatural relation between two races which furnished a problem dealt with by statesman, philanthropist, and fanatics, which was solved by God, Himself in His own way; and it is with an outgrowth of that problem and its solution . . . there came the daring little band of Englishmen and who settled the town of Hampton.[18]

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[17] Walter Dyson, "Founding of the School of Medicine at Howard University, 1866-1873," *Howard University Studies in History* 10 (1929).

[18] Veronica Alease Davis, *The Campus History Series Hampton University* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 7.

As Negroes settled in Hampton, there became a need to assist them as they adjusted to their new state of freedom. Again, another school idea began as a church-oriented answer to the lack of education.

> [I]n August 1861, the association commissioned Reverend L. C. Lockwood as a missionary. Upon arriving at Hampton, he opened up a Sabbath school for the contrabands in the house of ex-President Tyler on September 15, 1861. Later several other Sunday schools were started.[19]

From the first school that was in a small brown house to the schoolhouse that the federal government built to the school programs by Mrs. Peacock and the Butler School, the education of Negroes in the Hampton area, that included Norfolk and surrounding cities, was well underway. The founder and first principal of Hampton Institute, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, was fortunate to have had the groundwork already laid for him.[20]

> The church societies therefore decided to plant institutions of higher grade among the Negroes so that their graduates might fill the positions in the new public schools and in a larger sense assume the leadership of the race.
>
> With this idea in mind the American Missionary Association in 1866 decided to establish a normal school at Hampton, the place where already for five or six years they had been laboring among the freedmen. Here were thousands of Negroes many of whom had come as refugees during the war, the place possessed distinct geographical advantages, and greater still this neighborhood nourished the American commonwealth in its infancy. In this vicinity, at James- town, the first permanent settlement was made in 1607 and here Captain John Smith saved the colony. Twelve years after this date came the twenty Negroes in the Dutch vessel marking the planting of the institution of slavery in this country. It was now only fitting that the neighborhood which first enslaved the Negro should have the honor of planting a school which would become the very cornerstone for one phase of the Negro's training in this country.[21]

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[19] Davis, *The Campus History Series Hampton University,* 137.

[20] Frances Greenwood Peabody, *Education for Life: The Story of Hampton Institute* (New York, NY: Doubleday Page and Company, 1918), 4.

[21] Davis, *The Campus History Series Hampton University,* 145.

> The story of the rise of Hampton Institute illustrates the well-known fact that no one person can be given entire credit for some particular achievement. Armstrong was the moving spirit in the establishment of Hampton and his ideas have influenced the atmosphere, curriculum, and aims of that institution until the present time. On the other hand, as we have tried to show here, the soil was already prepared for him by the six or seven years' educational campaign of the combined efforts of the Union military forces, the American Missionary Association, and the Freedmen's Bureau. Armstrong was merely a creature of these organizations. Hampton is the mother of Tuskegee's Booker T. Washington (a Hampton alumni).[22]

I have personal knowledge of Hampton University and its scholarly academic program and beautiful campus, because a niece that I raised and educated is an alumnus of Hampton's School of Nursing, which is well-known for its academic excellence. This campus is well constructed and manicured, which offers the students a warm, clean, and pleasant learning environment. Like Howard, Hampton also offers bachelor's, master's, doctorates, and a medical degree. Distinguished alumni include Booker T. Washington, Septima Poinsette Clark, Tolley Kennon, Benjamin Brown, and many other writers, educators, actors, doctors, tradesmen, and lawyers, who began their studies in the University's pre-law program.

Traveling farther south, there are what is considered the brother/sister duo of HBCUs – Morehouse and Spelman Colleges in Atlanta, Georgia. Morehouse was founded in 1867 by William Jefferson White as a means to liberate Blacks immediately after the Civil War. It sits on a sixty-one-acre campus and offers bachelor's, master's, doctorates, and professional degrees. Additionally, it stresses religious studies and encourages its students to become financially secure.[23]

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[22] Davis, *The Campus History Series Hampton University*, 149.

[23] Robert Palmer, Mykia O. Cadet, Kofi LeNiles, and Jocelyn L. Hughes, *Personal Narratives of Black Educational Leaders: Pathways to Academic Success* (New York, NY: Rutledge, 2019), 115.

In order to illustrate the connection I am making between my context and the work of the HBCUs, I present this brief case study of Jaquial D. Durham, a former student at Morehouse College. The following was his immediate insight when he began to learn more about what would become his new home away from home, and he learned that:

> Morehouse College is a private, all male, liberal arts, historically Black college located in Atlanta, Georgia. The college is one of the few remaining traditional men's liberal arts college in the United States. Morehouse is the largest men's college in the United States, with an enrollment of more than 2,000. The goal of Morehouse is to redefine the meaning of leadership and to aid in developing young men into leaders who focus their lives around compassion, civility, integrity, spiritual discipline, intellectual astuteness, and moral wisdom. Morehouse is noted for developing men with a passion for volunteerism by connecting them to their communities and helping them to see that, as individuals and as a squadron of educated Black men, they can make a difference. Morehouse is an excellent liberal arts educational institution with an environment that is conducive to academic, social, and spiritual growth. The mystique of Morehouse is like joining a family and a brotherhood like none other. As a Black male who had been ignored, stereotyped, and marginalized, it's about finally finding that 'home' that, deep inside, you always knew existed, where you are the heart, soul, and hope of the community.[24]

This particular book consists of several testimonials of Morehouse students, and yet, I found Durham's to be the relevant one to the young men of the context and in my family. For the most part, they feel ignored, stereotyped, and marginalized, having grown up in a southern rural and impoverished area. They are desperately seeking to find their place in the world. With all of the dysfunctional behavior around them, they are at risk of falling victim to looking for wholeness in gangs, crimes, and the streets that will offer them nothing but prison cells and/or early graves. This young man was initially disappointed about not getting into FAMU, and when he received the acceptance letter from

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[24] Palmer, Cadet, LeNiles, and Hughes, *Personal Narratives of Black Educational Leaders*, 115.

Morehouse, he reflected back on the website and remembered the words above. Once he began to matriculate at that great institution, he realized how much he could grow from becoming a part of a healthy and safe brotherhood, one entirely different from the brotherhood that gang life offers. He realized that he needed the compassion, civility, and integrity that Morehouse offered, and he was blessed by attending the school.

I could have easily pulled up interesting facts about Morehouse, but there was nothing more powerful than the words of a student, especially one who did not want to attend Morehouse in the first place, but ultimately found that it offered exactly what he needed to become a strong man. Since beginning this work, my nephew, Tyrone Jr (T.J.), has become a student at Morehouse, and his brother, Jalen, will become a student in Fall 2025– both on full academic scholarships. In the brief time that he has been a student, he has already demonstrated a level of maturity and self-awareness that I personally did not see beforehand. While TJ has always been a young man of high morals and ethics, there is a new thirst for knowledge and a newfound respect for the contributions of his foreparents. My conversations with him about his studies and experiences at Morehouse have given me new insight into how an HBCU contributes more than just academics to the lives of its students.

Morehouse has distinguished graduates such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Julian Bond, Samuel L. Jackson, Spike Lee, and many others who have made outstanding contributions to this country. I am proud to share that I have a first cousin and two nephews who are all Morehouse men.

Morehouse has what many call a “sister” college across the way, known as Spelman College.

> Founded in 1881, Spelman College, the oldest historically Black college for women and now Fidely recognized as one of the leading liberal arts colleges in the United States, is an unparalleled success story in higher education. This history, written by Florence Matilda Read, president of Spelman College from 1926-1953, tells the compelling story of its beginnings. Founded by two New England women, Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles, in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, its growth was phenomenal.[25]

The all-girls school was initially known as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, and the first college degree was awarded in 1901, while the school was named Spelman College in 1924.[26] It was another HBCU that began as a school to teach Christianity. It is another confirmation to me that the church context is the place to provide training to help the leaders of the church be able to discern and identify dysfunctional behavior in themselves, their families, and the church. Currently, the church has a member attending Spelman, and I have Spelman graduates in my family.

The school became formally affiliated with Morehouse College and Atlanta University in 1929.[27] The mission of Spelman is:

> Spelman College is a historically Black college and a global leader in the education of women of African descent. The college is dedicated to academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences and the intellectual, creative, ethical and leadership development of its students. Through diverse learning modalities, Spelman engages the many cultures of the world and promotes positive social change.[28]

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[25] Florence Matilda Read, *The Story of Spelman: Second Edition* (Atlanta, GA: Spelman College Publisher, 2015), 5.

[26] Stephanie J. Shaw, *What A Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 279.

[27] Wanda K. W. Elbright, *Dance on the Historically Black Campus: The Familiar and The Foreign* (Geneva, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 101.

[28] Elbright, *Dance on the Historically Black Campus,* 101.

What Morehouse offers males, Spelman offers females, and that is more than an education, but the opportunity to build sisterhoods that would expose them to other ways of living and bind them together for a lifetime.

In addition to all being Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the colleges highlighted in this Historical Foundation chapter were all founded on Christian principles by Christian leaders, both Black and White. It confirms to me that this historical period in the history of our country belongs as part of the work that will be done in this project and paper. The main reason for this work is to empower the context of Piney Grove to become a place of refuge and healing, and a place of deliverance from those who have struggled with familial dysfunction. Many of the students and graduates of HBCUs can identify with this dysfunctional behavior, and many chose HBCUs to attend because they were seeking a healthy environment among their own people – an environment that some had never experienced at home.

Although the church and Christianity are the answers to deliverance and healing from the effects of growing up in a dysfunctional household. The church is often referred to as a "hospital" where people who are sick in their spirits go seeking healing. It is a refuge where those who are on the run from their own dysfunctional behavior and the dysfunctional behavior that they grew up in are seeking to find a safe, confidential place where they can rest from their journey. It is a beacon of hope and light where one who is walking in darkness and despair can walk out of that darkness and experience an encounter with Jesus that gives them renewed hope and a marvelous light. Is the church the only place, certainly not? Although in rural communities it may be. But these highlighted colleges and many other HBCUs have proven that they, too, are places that

offer balm for sin-sick souls, shelter for those on the run, and hope and light for those walking in darkness.

From the Biblical Foundations Chapter, Joseph did not have a formal education, but through his experience and exposure, he became "educated" and powerful enough to teach his brothers about forgiveness, grace, and love. This led to breaking the curse of dysfunction that had been attacking every generation of Abraham. Do HBCUs answer all of the issues that haunt the Black person in America? No, but they afford an opportunity for Blacks to be educated, self-sufficient, and empowered. Did education in and of itself completely change the lives of the freedmen and newly free slaves? No, even over 150 years later, all people - but more specifically Blacks - are still struggling with discrimination, social injustices, lower pay, fewer promotions, and even sometimes being treated as second-class citizens. Yet, as I have always been taught, "education is the key." It is the key to being knowledgeable, to stand against the wiles of the enemy and take one's rightful place in this country, even in the midst of systemic racism. It is the key to understanding that although one may have grown up in a dysfunctional family home, one does not have to live that way. It is the key to teaching the next generations to come to do better and want to live better. HBCUs have made education accessible to all people, not just Black people. Each of the institutions highlighted in this chapter has students of every race in attendance. That is the same for most, if not all, HBCUs. The purpose of founding them was never to encourage segregation, but to afford Black people the opportunity to overcome segregation and thrive in a society that left them beaten, broken, and lost.

Piney Grove has long been committed to higher education. One of the best influences that the former pastor of thirty-four years had was that he and his wife were graduates of HBCUs, and they encouraged the members to seek higher education. Furthermore, the church is located less than an hour from eight universities and community colleges. That is certainly the beauty of North Carolina being a "college" state. Many of the members have successfully pursued higher education, and they constantly instill that in each generation. Because of the close proximity of the schools, many also commute, and therefore, they obtain an education without much exposure. That is a matter that will be addressed in a later chapter. Only one of the post-secondary institutions that are nearby is an HBCU, Fayetteville State College, and some of the members of the context have either acquired their bachelor's or post-graduate degrees at that well-known and highly regarded institution.

The problem is not that they do not value higher education; it is that they do not use their education to address the dysfunction in their families and the church. It appears that the more educated some are, the more they try to separate themselves from the dysfunctional members of their families. They also express a denial about the secrecy of the dysfunction or how the dysfunction in previous generations has impacted their lives. Education has given them a feeling of superiority, which sometimes causes another dysfunction, known as classism. Such classism may make those who did not attend college feel as if they are not valued or validated. This feeling is not limited to the family setting, but for many years it was also felt in other contexts. Educated persons were the only ones to be considered for leadership positions. Therefore, others felt like they had very little to offer. Eventually, this caused them to leave the church and seek membership

in church families where they felt validated and where they could find ways to serve that were not offered in this particular context.

The work and foundation of HBCUs were shared during the workshop/Bible study modules. The participants learned more about the impact of education in eradicating dysfunction. They gained more understanding of how they can utilize the church's college graduates to address the unwanted behavior in their family and the context. Although I have only attended predominantly white institutions, I am certain that during the Reconstruction Era, the founding of HBCUs was the best and only action that could survive and grow as time continued to move forward.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Systemic dysfunctional behavior usually occurs when there are oppressors and the oppressed. This is true even in a family unit or church context, and in this case, it is generational. Each foundation chapter has shared the plight of such dysfunction. The Ministry Focus revealed it in my family and the families in the context. The Biblical Foundations chapter discussed the dysfunction of Abraham's household and his descendants, with most of the focus being on his great-grandson, Joseph. This Historical Foundations chapter shares how the founding of HBCUs empowered former slaves and their descendants to discern, address, and overcome the dysfunction that started during slavery and still affects the Black family in the twenty-first century. The theology that will be used is Minjung Theology, which has its foundation in the Korean culture. Minjung Theology emerged in the 1970s from the experience of South Korean Christians in their struggle for social justice.[1] It "is firmly rooted in a particular situation and growing out of the struggles of Christians who embrace their own history as well as the universal message of the Bible."[2]

[1] Andrew Eungi Kim and Jongman Kim, "Minjung Theology," *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, 2023, https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/MinjungTheology#section1.

[2] Philip L Whicker, "Asian Theologies in Review," 1985, 461, https://web.archive.org/web/20050211084644/http:/theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1985/v41-4-tabletalk2.htm.

Reiterating that the problem at this context is that "the members of Greater Piney Grove United Methodist Church wrestle with generational familial dysfunction," and the hypothesis is "if the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members to identify the same." It is important to maintain focus on the foundation of this project. The issue is deeper than the problem statement denotes because the members of this context not only wrestle with familial dysfunction, but also, they are seemingly unable to define, identify, recognize, or discern it. Therefore, even those who are leaders - not only in the church - but in their families and workplaces, unknowingly exhibit dysfunctional behavior. They so easily recognize dysfunction in others, but they do not see it in themselves. The ability to see fault in others, but not in oneself, is prevalent in this context and in my own family. My mother and her four children, and a niece and nephew that she assisted in raising, are the most educated in the family. Among us, we have my mother, who is a first-generation college student, with a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, along with an engineer, an attorney/pastor, a school counselor, a chiropractor, a clinical psychologist with a doctorate, and a pediatrician. We are expected to be the "brains" of the family and to be able to address dysfunctional behavior, and yet we are sometimes at the root of the behavior, and still consider everyone else the problem. One thing that I know is that the leaders of the context and the leaders of my family have in common is that if we could discern and understand the dysfunction, we would address it. Dysfunction can be very subtle and can enter into a family structure in such a cunning manner, until it is deeply rooted before it is recognized. By that time, much damage had been done, causing much

pain, and no one knows how it got started, and furthermore, no one wants to take accountability for it.

Like in the context and my family, in most, if not all, situations, this problem has culminated into a culture of oppression within family units, wherein there are the oppressors and the oppressed. Because of this, the oppressors begin to seek love in "all the wrong means and places," which may lead them to become alcoholics, drug addicts, sexual predators, and criminals. The oppressors can become condescending, self-righteous, and judgmental. The oppressed can become passive, submissive, and lack self-confidence or the strength to defend themselves. There is a need for a "safe space" that both can run to and not only find refuge, but solace and hope, and that place should be the church; but how can the church help when the church is dysfunctional itself?

As stated above, the hypothesis is "if the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members to identify the same." The members will also be led in studying the scripture and learn of dysfunctional families in the Bible and hearing sermons that proclaim the hope and power of being delivered from dysfunction. There is a great need for healing in the context's family units, and since the members are all related, this same dysfunction has infiltrated the church body. Although most of the members are relatives, they are not all genuinely close and loving. Generations of siblings and first cousins do not speak to each other or value what each other contributes to the greater body. This project delved deep into this issue of dysfunction, and members participated in workshops and other activities that helped them to discern and identify dysfunction so that they will be able to recognize it and, prayerfully, one day alleviate it for the betterment of future generations.

Because the church is the largest in the community, the leadership has a vision that the church will one day become a true beacon of hope and place of refuge for those who experience oppression resulting from dysfunction. Additionally, the hope is that the church will develop into a place of deliverance for those who have grown to be oppressors.

Piney Grove is located only two miles from the South Carolina border; therefore, many members live in South Carolina. The community is also known as Piney Grove and covers approximately a five-mile radius. Piney Grove is the largest church in the community and is the largest United Methodist African American Church in Robeson County, North Carolina. The membership is made up of interlocking families where siblings and cousins from one family marry the siblings and cousins of another family, thus making up not only a church family but an entire community. There are only a few families that are not related to this integral group. The dysfunction has been prevalent in this context for generations, even though most of the members are relatives. As shared above, I am a member of an interlocking family unit that is just like the context, as well as having grown up in a family and church setting that dealt with and still deals with dysfunction. In both cases, the foundational issue is that there is an inability to recognize familial dysfunction, and therefore, such dysfunction is not addressed.

Minjung Theology

Again, the theology that this project focuses on is Minjung Theology, which is highly promoted by Dr. Andrew Sung Park, who asserts,

> Theology is contextual. Liberation theology emerged from the concern of Latin American theologians for the poor in their countries. Political

> theology came into being in response to the privatized hermeneutics of existentialist theology in Germany. Black theology arose from the struggle of the Blacks for their civil rights in the United States. Feminist theology emerged from women's awareness of themselves in relation to God's freedom. Minjung theology came out of the struggle of concerned Korean Christians for social and political justice in Korea.[3]

First, let us address the six-million-dollar question or the proverbial "elephant in the room." With the context being a Black church, why are we using Korean Theology and not Black Liberation Theology? Let us recognize that the term "minjung" is not a strict academic term created to classify and categorize certain groups of people. Rather, it is a term chosen and subsequently utilized for a strategic purpose. The truth is that Minjung Theology is not a classroom theology where the student can leisurely sit in an "ivory tower" and engage in theological speculation or conceptual activity. Rather, this theology has its vitality and power only when it is rooted in liberating the minjung. [4, 5]

> Minjung Theology addresses the suffering that victims have experienced at the hands of sinners. It is a spiritual response to economic and political subjugation by the upper-class (e.g., the Korean military, national corporations funded with foreign monies and foreign interests) upon the lower-class (e.g., factory workers and farmers). Its purpose is to provide a prophetic voice of criticism aimed at the oppressors of the minjung. This theology ultimately found its voice and stamina through the marriage of Korean college students advocating freedom, equality and human rights to the lower working class suffering in the factories.[6, 7]

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[3] Andrew Park, "Minjung Theology: A Korean Contextual Theology," http:/biblicalstudies.org.uk /pdf/iit/33-4_01.pdf.

[4] Tolly A. Kennon, III, "Breaking Brokenness: Mentorship Training Designed To Address The Brokenness That Results From Parental Absence During Childhood," class session, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, May 2017, 68.

[5] Chang-Nack Kim, "Korean Minjung Theology: An Overview," *Chicago Theological Seminary* 85, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 2, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCO host.

[6] Kennon, III, "Breaking Brokenness," 69.

[7] Dong-Kun Kim, "Korean Minjung Theology in History and Mission," *Studies in World Christianity* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 1996).

In essence, the relevant focus of the Minjung Theology is not about the Korean population, but the existence of the minjung (sin) that permeates people of all nations, races, classes, and cultures. However, it still behooves me to take a look at Black Liberation Theology.

Black Liberation Theology

James Cone defines Black Liberation Theology as "an interpretation of divinity and humanity from the hermeneutical lens of the Black experience, the central figure of which is God, the 'Liberator of the oppressed from bondage.'"[8] Cone continues, "The task of Black Theology, then, is to analyze the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of oppressed Blacks so they will see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition, and bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression"[9] While Cone's definition of Black Theology is correct and has been helpful in circumstances of addressing the oppression of Black people, it also has its share of critics. In support of Black Liberation Theology, Raphael Warnock shared that,

> It represented a new and self-conscious form of God-talk, a sophisticated apologia for a faith formed in slavery and in defense of a Black liberationist trajectory that continues to bear witness against the sins of a nation that is at once putatively Christian and profoundly racist.[10]

However, Cone has faced criticism from J. Deotis Roberts, Cecil Cone, Gayraud Wilmore, Delores Williams, and others. Cone's theory is based on an ongoing battle of

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[8] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), ix.

[9] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 5.

[10] Raphael Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness (*New York, NY: New York Press 2013), 75.

oppression between Blacks and Whites, and some of his critics believe that the matter goes deeper. For example, J. Deotis Roberts, who is another pioneer of Black Liberation Theology, believed that to be truly liberated Blacks must work in conjunction with Whites and other oppressors to seek Christ for liberation and deliverance I agree with Roberts, especially regarding his contention for the prioritizing of the Black church as the leading institution for the liberation of whole persons and whole people.[11] Another critic of Cone is Delores Williams, who felt that neither Black Liberation nor Feminist Liberation addressed the oppression of Black women.

As noted, most Black theologians believe that James Cone was on point with his work regarding Black Liberation and that the liberation of Black people is grounded in the scriptures and the church. However, some believe that the work should go deeper and further in bringing forth healing and restoration of Black people. This critique of Black Liberation Theology elucidates my reasons for turning to Minjung Theology in this project. A missing component in Black Liberation Theology is adequately addressed by Minjung Theology. Minjung Theology speaks to the voice of the oppressed and their determination to identify their oppressions as well as their oppressors and enable them to be intentional about healing and deliverance from such oppression.

In Minjung Theology, *han,* which is loosely translated as sin, is the deepest level of being wounded, oppressed, and violated. It attends to human pain and suffering. I believe that Minjung Theology would better address the problem at Piney Grove because the familial dysfunction is difficult to identify, especially when it is so ingrained in family structures that it becomes somewhat "second nature" and appears to be "normal"

[11] J. Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 75.

to those who are unable to recognize dysfunction. Furthermore, there is no white oppressor or outside force to blame the dysfunction on. While the oppression of Blacks by Whites may be the underlying foundational reason behind Blacks oppressing other Blacks, there must be something deeper to explain the dysfunction. Additionally, we must look at how to overcome that plight and begin healing, instead of resting on the belief that we as a people cannot live in harmony because of generations of oppression by White people.

In addressing the problem of this context, Minjung Theology helps by defining the *han* personality type and how it plays a role in who becomes an oppressor and who becomes the oppressed when the playing field is level. Of particular concern to this project is the question of sibling rivalry or family conflict. When siblings grow up in the same household with the same advantages and disadvantages, how does one of them rise to superiority while treating the other as an inferior being? Furthermore, why is this seemingly acceptable and even validated by the parents and other members of the family, church, and community? And last but not least, why does the oppressed family member feel helpless in rising above it all and taking his or her rightful place in a family setting?

Minjung People's Lives

As we address the foregoing questions and struggle with the concept that oppression is not always just a racial or class matter but goes much deeper, let us look at liberation theology in a deeper manner, because sometimes there is a need for people to be liberated not from outsiders, but from each other. To learn more, let us delve into the Minjung people's lives.

> The Minjung are those people who have suffered from exploitation, poverty, socio-political oppression, and cultural repression throughout the ages. They know the pain of dehumanization. Their lives have been rooted in the age-old experience of suffering and the present experience of it. They have been treated as non-beings by their rulers.[12]

Here we find people who have been oppressed by their own people. Their oppressors have broken them by withholding the means of food and supplies for daily living, plus roles in leadership, and the ability to overcome suffering and oppression.

> The term was first used during the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), when the masses were dominated by the aristocratic *yangban* class. At that time, all the people who did not belong to this class were minjung. Under the Japanese colonial rule, all the Koreans, except a small minority of those who cooperated with the Japanese, were minjung. Today [in the 1970s and 1980s], the term minjung can be used to refer to all persons who are excluded from the privileged lifestyle under the dictatorial regime.[13]

Minjung Theology arose in the 1970s when the oppression of Korean people began to be addressed by theologians. The people of Korea were suffering from enslavement, brutality, and oppression by the Japanese rulers. Such suffering was seen in sexual slavery as well as labor slavery, genocide, and brutality. Although the country had been liberated in 1945, such liberation was met with a new type of oppression that infiltrated the lives of the least fortunate Korean people. As "the church" watched such debauchery, theologians began to seek the answer for deliverance in Christianity.[14] The infamous question was asked, Where is the Christian church in the midst of all of this suffering, and I would add dysfunction:

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[12] Andrew Sung Park, "Minjung Theology: A Korean Contextual Theology," http:/biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/iit/33-4_01.pdf.

[13] Sang Taek Lee, *Religion and Social Formation in Korea: Minjung and Millenarianism* (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 461.

[14] Kim, "Minjung Theology."

> Proponents of Minjung Theology believe that the context of Korea is similar. In many ways to the stories found in the Bible, and that God is demonstrably on the side of the poor and oppressed throughout the books of the Bible. The word Minjung translates literally as 'the mass of people' but a more comprehensive definition of the term is 'those who are oppressed politically, exploited economically, alienated socially, and kept uneducated in cultural and intellectual matters.' Another way of putting it is that the minjung are han-ridden people, which is a Korean word that roughly translates as resentment.[15]

Likewise, Blacks, and more specifically members of this context, believe that God is on the side of the oppressed in the Bible, as well as the oppressed of this day. Jesus Himself says, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). This is right after Luke 15, when we read of the parables of the lost sheep, coin, and prodigal son. Certainly, those parables reiterate God's call to leave the ninety-nine saved ones and go find the one that was lost.

Because Minjung Theology is a theology that focuses on the sin of the oppressors, it is imperative to point out that those who oppress their family members are sinning against them. One of the reasons that it is hard to identify dysfunctional behavior in a familial setting is that it seems harsh to some people to call transgressions against them a sin when the transgressor is family. That is the trick of the enemy to keep people in bondage with dysfunctional feelings that lead to dysfunctional behavior. In defining the Han theory, Nam-Dong Suh posits,

> For the poet Kim, the dialectic unification of Han and Dan means to undergo the four stages of revolution. The first stage is 'inviting God in the heart' (Shi-Chun-Ju,) the second stage is 'letting God grow in the body' {Yan-Churi-Ju), the third stage is 'practising the struggle for embodying God' (Haeng--Chun-Ju), the fourth stage is 'living as humble!

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[15] Cyris H. S. Moon and Mun Hŭi-sŏk, *A Korean Minjung Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (New York, NY: Orbis Press, 1985), vi.

> and resurrected champions of the Minjung beyond death' (Sang-Chun-Ju).[16]

Furthermore, Park defines "*han*" as:

> The critical wound of the heart generated by unjust psychosomatic repression, as well as by social, political, economic, and cultural oppression. It is entrenched in the hearts of the victims of sin and violence, and is expressed through such diverse reactions as sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, resentment, hatred, and the will to revenge.[17]

What Park describes here is seen within the deep realms of this context. The dysfunction is because of feelings of sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, resentment, hatred, and revenge. These feelings are expressed in such ways that they are destructive, and the generational effects of that destruction can no longer be denied or ignored.

The behavior is glaring, and it can even be seen during worship time in this context. Even during such a sacred time, siblings and cousins are not speaking, passing the peace, or acknowledging each other's presence. This is held as acceptable because the familial behavior within the households is much meaner and more destructive, leaving not only the oppressed as victims, but also the oppressors as victims of their own self-destruction. This is evidenced in a variety of issues, including addiction to alcohol, drugs, and gambling. These addictions have weakened and even destroyed some families. They are the triggers to domestic violence in practically every generation, and the saddest part is that it seems as if the violence is accepted. There have been incidents of family members actually killing each other. The issue of sexual molestation and immorality is heartbreaking as it is prevalent between fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters, and

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[16] Nam-Dong Suh, "Towards a Theology of Han," in *Minjung Theology* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 63.

[17] Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 10.

other family members. It is whispered about, but no one will address it head-on. This is because there is a challenge of a lack of empowerment among the people. They do not address issues because they do not believe that they have the strength or power to ignite change.

This is interesting in and of itself because, as rural, unexposed people, they hold education and furthering their careers highly. However, with such a high level of education, a military background, and the ownership of their own land, the people do not aspire to have much wealth. Many tend to live off the wealth of the earlier generations, and instead of building homes on the land that their ancestors left them, they are comfortable in mobile homes that will depreciate, rather than appreciate, in value. They also fail to tithe or save, and the need for financial literacy and deliverance is strong. They would rather spend their wealth on expensive cars, motorcycles, clothes, trips, and other depreciating things. Even if a financial literacy course or workshop is offered, they are not interested. Their complacency in their current situations is troubling. They know the promise of Jesus made in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (NRSVA). They have had in-depth studies about the Lord's desire that we prosper, even as our souls prosper. (See 3 John 2). The discussions are uplifting and hopeful, and yet nothing seems to move them forward.

Teen and unwed pregnancies are issues in this context. For more than five generations that I know of, young unwed girls have been having babies. There were thirteen babies conceived and born in a two-year period, and every one of them was born to a single mother. While all babies are miracles, there is a level of apathy when it comes

to young single women having seven and eight children from different men and not being married. This is alarming. While some churches frown on this, it is so prevalent in the history of Greater Piney Grove that it is celebrated. Should the birth of a new baby be celebrated? Certainly. However, there is a need for that same mother and father to be encouraged to exhibit more responsibility for their bodies, be held responsible for taking care of these babies, and be encouraged to do more with their lives.

I believe that all of this behavior, as well as other destructive behavior, is caused by minjung, and the oppressed have been oppressed for so long that they feel helpless and hopeless. The oppressed have seen their parents and grandparents live in such states of oppression until they have come to believe that it is just a way of life; thus, they are not able to discern and recognize it as sin and dysfunction. Such terminology as "dysfunction" is not even a part of their vocabulary when it comes to the way they live or the way their family members live. They are complacent and have comfort in others living in a like manner. When one is strong enough and has the desire to have more and do more, they are ridiculed and treated as outsiders because such aspirations are considered a statement that their counterparts in the family are considered less than them.

Thus, there is *han*, which is the resentment and bitterness of a situation. It is how those who are oppressed strike back at their oppressors in ineffective ways.[18] How can one articulate their pain when they have seen their fore-parents deal with the same pain and the same consequences of sin and do nothing about it? How can wounds be healed that have never been acknowledged? Who cries out for the broken when everyone is broken? How can the church be a place of refuge and healing for the broken when the

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[18] Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 19-20.

leadership in the church is among the broken? Since no one has been able to answer these questions, the hurt and pain simply matriculate from one generation to another and manifest themselves in the hearts of even the youngest of children. Babies are seeing their mothers abused or their parents strung out on drugs. Children do not know how to exhibit proper behavior because they do not have examples of proper behavior in their households. With technology and social media, the dysfunctional behavior is only getting worse because the platform is larger and wider to exhibit such behavior, and the members of the context have become spectators instead of regulators of such behavior.

This project will delve into the signs of familial dysfunction in order to help the members be able to discern, define, identify, and address dysfunction as it is considered sin or *han*, as the Korean culture calls it, when addressing minjung. The data collected will be used to identify the sources that exist to teach the members to know familial dysfunction when it rears its ugly head. The project will be biblically based with clinical input. Discernment is a spiritual gift that comes from God; therefore, it will include Bible studies that will be opened to the entire congregation. The entire congregation will hear sermons regarding how familial dysfunction was identified and addressed in the Holy Scriptures. Bible studies will address this issue as it is found in the Word and allow more input from the membership by allowing questions and discussions regarding identifying familial dysfunction. Additionally, a clinical psychologist specializing in family development will do workshops with the leaders of the church to not only strengthen their skills to identify familial dysfunction and how it affects the context, but also to train them to join the pastor in helping the members identify familial dysfunction.

The design of the project boldly attacked the minjung among God's people and began the process of healing that will understandably take much time to be completed to make the oppressed and the oppressors whole again. The project consisted of Bible study modules, discussing the scriptures lifted in the Biblical Foundations, and two sessions with a clinical psychologist who educated the participants regarding the signs of generational family dysfunction and ways to recognize them. The final modules included more Bible study and open discussion sessions regarding what the participants were learning and how they were growing in their understanding of generational dysfunction and the sin that caused it. Some of the leaders and members of the context acknowledged that generational familial dysfunction has been discerned, and they do want to heal so that future generations will not face the same plight that they have. Some are excited about this work and share my passion to address the generational sin and oppression in the context. Some are already addressing it in their family units, and such a movement requires much boldness because most of the family members are living in denial, ignorance, or both.

Chi-Ha Kim argued that *han* is inherited and transmitted from culture to culture and from generation to generation.[19] This is exactly what is happening at Piney Grove and within the family units that make up the church's membership. *Han* is being perpetuated from generation to generation, and it seems as if each generation is getting weaker. Those who have identified the oppression and sin have either moved away and do not return home much, or they simply refuse to reach out beyond the walls of their

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[19] Chi-Ha Kim, quoted in Nam-Dong Suh, "Towards a Theology of Han," in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, ed. Committee on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 64.

own homes. They have built a safe space, somewhat of a bubble, for them and their nuclear family, and they are not willing to take the chance to sacrifice that in order to address the *han* that so greatly affects the lives of their siblings, cousins, and church members.

This point is significant because for Korean religion, *han* is a feeling of inward frustration. There is no need or desire to express one's anger outwardly towards others. Instead, the sinned against experience a spirit of acquiescence. *Han,* for them, is more about feeling defeated and resigned to nothingness. In order to resolve han, Korean religion focused on releasing the pent-up frustration that the sinned against feel within themselves. The emphasis is on unraveling and or healing the *han* rather than taking revenge because of it. Kim asserts that the Korean minjung have recognized that *han* is like twisted strings that cannot be unraveled by the power of human beings.[20, 21] This is further confirmation that the minjung is not just for Korean contexts but can be used in this rural, African American church. One of the most significant hurdles that this context must cross on a daily basis is frustration. Frustration is kept silent and begins to fester on the inside of the oppressed until it becomes a badly infected "sore" that results in destructive behavior. Unlike the Black Liberation Theology that seemingly calls for the oppressed to make peace with the oppressor, per Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, or seek revenge, per the great Malcolm X, Minjung Theology calls for the oppressed to find peace within themselves. Again, it focuses on unraveling or healing that inward pain

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[20] Kennon, III, "Breaking Brokenness," 77.

[21] Dongsoo Kim, "The Healing of Han in Korean Pentecostalism," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 7, no. 15 (October 1999): 123-139.

instead of acting out because of it. This theology recognizes that it is beyond human power to do this alone; therefore, the oppressed must seek the power of God to help them.

This is where the church can play a critical role in helping the oppressed to stop being so angry and disillusioned with those who have oppressed them, starting with the person in the mirror. The church is like a hospital where the downtrodden and marginalized come to seek help to be made stronger, and the oppressors come with their sin-sick souls to find salvation and forgiveness for their sins. Minjung Theology will teach both the oppressed and the oppressors how to begin anew and heal.

Conclusion

In closing, this work has focused on moving forward. From the Biblical Foundations text, we find that after a lifetime of persecution, Joseph could not change his brothers or any other oppressors, but he had to find peace and forgiveness within himself in order to move forward and be the great man that he was called to be. God used him not only to provide food for this brother who betrayed and oppressed him in the worst way, but to show them the freedom of a forgiveness that they could not imagine receiving from a brother whom they once wanted to kill. That was more powerful and life-giving than any food that Joseph had to offer them. They were set free of years of hate, and maybe for some of them, shame and guilt, with one hug, one word of forgiveness, and one act of kindness from the one whom they oppressed. Their lives would never be the same, and a burden had been lifted from their shoulders when Joseph found healing of *han* in himself and therefore was able to extend it to his brothers.

In the Historical Foundation Chapter, it would have been impossible for Blacks to force their way into predominantly white schools. Years later, such opportunities as integration and affirmative action would make that possible. But back in the nineteenth century, the wisest thing for those who were kept from pursuing a higher education to do was to attend schools for Blacks; hence, we have the rise of HBCUs. The answer to the oppressed who were not allowed an education was found within themselves, and instead of seeking revenge or wasting time whining about not being able to attend White schools, those great pioneers sought refuge in their own schools that not only taught their students academic lessons but also life lessons. Although I have always attended predominantly white schools, I definitely recognize that I missed the lessons on how to overcome racism and discrimination in a way that I would have learned at an HBCU. Even with affirmative action under attack, there is no need to waste precious time fighting; it is far more fruitful to forge ahead and make our own way to ensure that our children will always have access to a quality education.

As my spiritual autobiography and the contextual analysis intersect in the Ministry Focus, one of the most significant revelations that was seen is that in both my family unit and the family units of the context, precious time had been spent trying to change others instead of focusing on making a new path for oneself. It takes a great deal of strength to unravel the tangled threads of our lives that *han*, oppression, hate, envy, and jealousy, and oppression have caused. Sometimes, we may give up because we feel as if our efforts are fruitless and a waste of time. The sad part is that so many just stop trying to save their own lives. Instead, they find refuge in self-destructive behavior that leaves a long line of victims behind to pick up the pieces or be destroyed themselves.

However, the Minjung Theology has shown us that if we truly believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can heal and move forward because we can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us. (See Philippians 4:13).

Minjung Theology is more helpful in this context because, in this project, we can begin to teach people how to seek God's help in unraveling their lives. Because minjung and *han* mean "sin," then it is one of the church's objectives to help people become aware of and accountable for their sin. True repentance, forgiveness, and redemption cannot occur until sin is acknowledged. At Piney Grove, that is more challenging, because the oppressors and the oppressed are usually closely related, thus any outward addressing of the matter brings forth fear that the entire family will be destroyed if certain secrets are revealed. Ultimately, the oppressed are encouraged to pray for strength and let things go for the good of the family system. I believe that the answer is in becoming more educated and spiritually grounded, in order to discern dysfunctional behavior, which one day can open the doors to means of addressing such behavior. This first step of discerning familial dysfunction will be the beginning of deliverance and healing. The leaders of the context, who were project participants, were taught that they are God's beloved and that He does not desire them to be broken or oppressed, and likewise, God does not desire for them to be unrepentant or heartless while oppressing others. They learned of the compassion of God that moved Him to send His only begotten Son, that those who believe would not perish but have everlasting life. They learned that where they have failed to unravel and fix their lives, they can rise above it all with the help of God. As the story of Jacob, Joseph, and their family was discussed in the Bible studies, they learned how dysfunctional, harmful behavior seeped into the family of Abraham and his

descendants and how such a curse was broken when Joseph chose to forgive his brothers and bring about reconciliation. The clinical workshops taught them how psychology plays a role in helping them to identify, define, and recognize the dysfunction. Once you know your "beast," you can defeat it. Those workshops gave them some tools to help their psyche as they learned from within how to make changes in their lives. They also saw that their support of the younger generations to attend colleges, especially HBCUs, is positive, because education is the key to overcoming ignorance and teaching students about the culprits of dysfunction and how to avoid falling into the same patterns. Once the members of the context learned these things, they gained a better understanding of the Minjung Theology and could see themselves clearly through the eyes of God. They began to have hope that as the church moved forward, they could see beauty come out of the ashes of their family dysfunction, and the context would become a beacon of hope and refuge for the entire community.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

"The word psychology derives from the Greek word *psyche,* for spirit or soul. The latter part of the word psychology derives from the Greek word ' psychology, ' which means 'study' or 'research.'[1] This word was first used during the Renaissance Era. William James narrowly defined psychology in the 1890s; however, for the purposes of this chapter, "folk psychology" is better suited. "Folk psychology is the understanding of the mental states and behaviors of people held by ordinary people, as contrasted with psychology professionals' understanding.[2] Folk psychology is a name traditionally used to denote our everyday way of understanding or rationalizing intentional actions in mentalistic terms. This quotidian competence is known by other names in the philosophical literature: Commonsense psychology, naïve psychology, *homo sapiens* psychology which speaks to the person theory of humans, the intentional stance, propositional attitude psychology, and belief-desire psychology.[3]

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[1] Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. "psychology," 2001, https://www.etym online.com/w ord/psychology/.

[2] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Aristotle's Psychology," July 2010, https://plato.stan ford.edu/ entries/folkpsych-theory/ plato.stanford.edu.

[3] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Folk Psychology as a Theory," 2021, https://plato.stan ford.edu/ entries/folkpsych-theory/plato.stanford.edu.

> The theory that has been chosen for this interdisciplinary insight into this work is psychology, and more specifically, the psychology of the family. Psychology is the study of one's mind and the behavior that comes as a result of the thoughts that penetrate the mind, both consciously and unconsciously. This includes all mental processes such as thoughts, feelings, and motives.[4]

There is an intentionality about using folk psychology because it is best understood by someone who does not have the education or scientific background to understand the theory of psychology at a higher level. This project will be done with church leaders who have very little or no training in psychology, and thus it is imperative that they be taught the concept in such a manner that they will not only understand it but be able to explain it to others in their families and the church.

I have spent the last twenty-three years facilitating a program in the prisons of southeastern North Carolina entitled "Thinking For A Change." This program directly deals with the psychological aspect of how one's thoughts and feelings impact one's behavior. The cognitive thinking program was developed to help inmates who had served lengthy prison sentences learn how to think differently before re-entering society. The goal of the program is to prepare the inmate to be a productive citizen and reduce the chances of recidivism, which would result in a revolving door back behind the walls of a prison. "Thinking For A Change" is not just for inmates. I have also used this program in corporations for employees and middle management. Many times, people do not realize that their behavior is directly related to their thoughts. Once one gets a clear understanding of this concept, then one can begin to recognize unhealthy thoughts and be more intentional about processing the way one thinks in a given situation. For example, if

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[4] Dodge Fernald, *Psychology: Six Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008), 10.

someone insults a person, certain thoughts are triggered. For many, the thoughts are, “I have been insulted.” “I have been disrespected,” or “I must show this person that they best respect me or deal with my wrath.” Such thoughts can then stimulate feelings of anger, humiliation, embarrassment, and revenge. These thoughts and feelings can lead to verbal outbursts, physical altercations, and behavior that can land the person back in trouble. “Thinking For A Change” teaches the group members to stop and process their thoughts. As one processes his/her thoughts, that person can identify dangerous thoughts that can lead to dangerous behavior. One can literally learn how to think differently and instead of acting on the initial thoughts, entertain such thoughts as, “I will not let this person push my buttons.” “I don’t want any trouble.” “I can walk away and ignore this.” The program also helps a person to identify signs that their feelings are out of control such as the physical signs (i.e., fast heartbeats, sweaty palms, pounding headaches). Again, these feelings can be managed by stopping and taking deep breaths and calming down. The psychological aspect of this is that this may sound like a long process as it is explained, but literally, all of this can happen within seconds. The program teaches that behavior can be controlled within seconds, if one learns to have better control of one’s thoughts and feelings, thus, trouble can be avoided.

It may be asked why I see the need to share the aspects of the “Thinking For A Change” program. The reason is that it was designed to alleviate dysfunctional behavior. Furthermore, I will be conducting Bible studies and preaching sermons in this area, and I feel the need to share my own personal background in the subject matter. This chapter discusses the psychology of the family unit and how such psychology can directly cause generational dysfunction. I also find it necessary to share my personal experience with

working with individuals who have spent years imprisoned. I have discovered that often their behavior is a result of generational dysfunction that has permeated their families for decades and possibly centuries. As we look at the psychology of the family through the lens of folk psychology, we delve deeper into how the study of psychology interacts with the project problem, my Biblical Foundations, Theological Foundations, and Historical Foundations, and see how it is relevant to the problem identified.

Interdisciplinary Theory

The context's problem of generations of dysfunctional familial behavior has culminated in a culture of oppression within nuclear family units, wherein there are the oppressors and the oppressed. Because of this, they begin to seek love in "all the wrong means and places," which leads some to become alcoholics, drug addicts, abusers, sexual predators, and criminals. This is where they find their refuge, not the church. Others are victimized by their own family members or become codependents. Paraphrased, the hypothesis is that if these members participate in a six-week project that helps them to identify and understand familial dysfunction, then they will have the knowledge needed to discern the presence of dysfunction in their own lives and family. There is a great need for healing in the family units, and since the members are all related, this same dysfunction has infiltrated the church body. Although most of the members are relatives, they are not all genuinely close and loving. Generations of siblings and first cousins do not fellowship with or even speak to each other, let alone value what each other contributes to the greater body.

To gain a clearer understanding of family psychology, let us consider the following:

> Family psychology is a complex field, as it includes systems perspectives on the multiple influences on relationships, developmental perspectives on how relationships are formed and sustained over time, cultural perspectives on how society and traditions affect relationships, the intersection of individual differences and social relationships, and practice components in how to affect real and meaningful changes in couple, parent, and family relationships.[5]

In order to address the unique dynamics of the context as a rural, Black church, we must first look at the study of African American psychology. The foundation of this doctoral work can be established by examining the work of Amanda Ann Gregory, whose study of the six major dysfunctional family roles is shared later in this chapter. Gregory's look at family psychology in general and William Grier and Price Cobb's study in *Black Rage* gives a strong understanding of the psychology of the family in general, and of the Black family in particular. Again, since Gregory's work is already stated in detail, here we can look at *Black Rage*, which covers the various settings that Black people must adapt to in and outside of their homes, and the cultural norms that have been established as a result of surviving slavery, the Reconstruction and Jim Crow Eras.[6]

The culture of the context has evolved into systemic elitism within the body. This elitism is based on the perceptions of the members about themselves and each other. Perceptions that are rooted in generational dysfunction. The real issue is that very few members, if any, can clearly define and understand familial dysfunction, and for the few that can, they either do not recognize it in their own families or feel helpless to address

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[5] Arin M. Connel, "What Is Family Psychology?" *Journal of Family Psychology* 36 (February 2022): 1.

[6] William Grier and Price Cobb, *Black Rage*, (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 1968). 23.

and/or change the on-going pattern of behavior. This has been the plight of so many tight-knit Black rural communities until it has become commonplace and even seems normal to too many of the members of this context. The significance of delving into Black psychology is important and imperative in that it will aid in understanding how the psychology of the family is related to the biblical, historical, and theological foundation theories that have been addressed in previous chapters of this work. Questionable sources have shown that African psychology sometimes focuses on enhancing self as a means of individuals becoming healed.

> The first African American to receive a PhD in psychology in the United States was Francis C. Sumner from Clark University of Massachusetts in 1920. Known as the 'Father of Black Psychology,' he conducted his dissertation research on the psychoanalysis of Freud and Adler. He became the chair of the Department of Psychology at Howard University in Washington, DC, which became the leading university for providing training to African Americans at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.[7]

Black or African psychology speaks to a dynamic manifestation of African-centered principles where these ideas are used in the understanding of ordered and disordered behaviors in people of African descent. Relying on the principle of harmony within the universe as the natural order of human experience, these core elements of an African-centered psychology include the spirit that permeates everything that exists in the universe, the notion that everything in the universe is interconnected, the idea that the collective is the

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[7] Faye Z. Belgrave and Kevin W. Allison, *African American Psychology: From Africa to America*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), location 1029, Kindle.

most salient element of existence, and the idea that self-knowledge encompasses the key to mental health.[8]

Black Rage describes the various ways that Blacks feel devalued in a racist society. The pain of racism is one that the members of the context know well, and they have acknowledged it and either worked around the racism that they face or gained tools to accomplish in the midst of it. The presence of racism is a part of their reality, and they join forces to overcome it. There are indications that the African psychology or African American psychology is crucial to people of such culture having healthy self-esteem. Because with healthy self-esteem, those persons will be empowered to live a mentally and emotionally healthy life and make wise decisions. With this state of emotional healthiness, it is less likely that people will turn to dysfunctional behavior to cope with problems, compensate for deficiencies, or feel empowered in the family unit. Again, psychology plays a significant role in the overall health of people. This is all true, and yet the real issue in the context and its community is that racism is dealt with because it is recognizable, while elitism in the family breeds generational dysfunction, because the members of the context and the surrounding community cannot discern or identify such dysfunction.

So often, a person may struggle with identifying or recognizing that the way he or she is living is not healthy, and that person does not even understand how they fit into the family dynamics. This leaves them feeling frustrated and

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[8] Thomas A. Parham, "Foundations for an African American Psychology: Extending Roots to an Ancient Kemetic Past," in *The Handbook of African American Psychology*, ed. Flelen Neville, Brendesha Tynes, and Shawn O. Utsey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 10.

overwhelmed, even when it appears to others that they are doing well. Dysfunctional behavior does not always have to manifest itself in bad behavior; it can also be seen in good behavior that is not necessarily healthy. Therefore, it is important that one understands oneself and the role that one plays in the family unit. It is also important that Black people be able to discern a certain rage that arises within the context of their family units, causing dysfunction, in the same way that they recognize rage due to racism.

Reflecting upon my spiritual autobiography, in the past, I never examined the role that I play in my own family unit or that my role is a sign of dysfunction, because on the surface, I appear to be the "good child."

> The McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF) postulates that a positive family environment is necessary for the healthy development of the physical, psychological, and social functioning of its family members (Epstein, Bishop, & Levin, 1978). The MMFF proposes that the family system is comprised of six key dimensions of functioning (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983): Problem Solving (the family's ability to resolve problems), Communication (how family members exchange verbal information), Roles (the clarity and appropriateness of the allocation of family roles), Affective Responsiveness (the extent to which family members experience appropriate affect over a range of stimuli), Affective Involvement (the extent to which family members are interested in and value each other's activities and concerns), and Behavior Control (how family members express and maintain standards of behavior).[9,10]

Let us examine the roles of different people in a family setting to better understand how they interrelate and possibly contribute to the family's overall dysfunction.

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[9] Yanhui Wang, Lili Tian, Leilei Guo, and E. Scott Huebner, "Family Dysfunction and Adolescents' Anxiety and Depression: A Multiple Mediation Model," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 66 (January-February 2020).

[10] N. B. Epstein et al., "The McMaster Family Assessment Device," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* (1983).

Amanda Ann Gregory states that there are six dysfunctional family roles in most families. This is even more possible and prevalent in large families. In this particular context, families range from one or two children to twenty-one children born of the same parents. For generations, the family units have been extremely large, and while in the twenty-first century the size of family units has decreased, in this context, single mothers are still birthing and raising much more than five children. This has enabled the various roles in the family to continue to contribute to functional and dysfunctional environments. It is imperative to look at each role because each role exists in the family units in this context, as well as my own family unit. Being able to identify my role and recognizing how it has contributed to the strengths, weaknesses, and even maladies of my own family has been enlightening; and such self-awareness, if properly received and analyzed by the members of the context, can make a positive impact and begin a healing process that is much needed. Gregory lists and explains these roles.

The Enabler (Aliases: "The Martyr," "The Caregiver," "The Strong One")

On the outside, the enabler is considered the strong and positive person in the family. This role can be held by any member of the family, both adults and children. Many times, the enabler serves as a caregiver, a protector, and a rescuer. They are usually given or undertake and manage intense responsibilities and obligations. Such responsibility is often too much for one person. They are unable to establish and maintain boundaries with family members and, as a result, they are always on call to the needs of their family.

The Jester (Aliases: "The Comedian," "The Cute One," "The Class Clown")

Jesters are very seldom emotionally open and honest about their true feelings. They tend to want to appear carefree and the comical one with other family members. They face challenges in identifying and expressing their genuine feelings because they fear that doing so may cause or contribute to conflict within their family. When they experience negative emotions such as sadness, anger, or anxiety, they tend to cover them up with a smile or a joke.[11]

The Scapegoat (Aliases: "The Problem," "The Bad One," "The Crazy One")

The scapegoat is the person in the family who is obviously struggling or their struggles are seen more than others. Many times, they exhibit unhealthy behaviors such as participation in illegal activities or acting out in the classroom or at home. They might be considered unstable or rebellious. The scapegoat sometimes feels the need to be in the family spotlight and they satisfy this need by appearing as if they have additional needs.

The Hero (Aliases: "The Overachiever," "The Successful One," "The Good One")

The "hero" uses success, perfectionism, and/or achievement in order to cope with dysfunctional family dynamics. To others, the hero can appear highly functional. However, inside, they often feel shameful, inadequate, and insecure. Heroes rarely feel

[11] A. Gregory, "Dysfunctional Family Roles Part 1: Are You an Enabler or a Jester?,) Symmetry Counseling blog, 2018, https://www.symmetrycounseling.com/family-therapy-chicago/dysfunctional-family-roles-part-1-are-you-an-enabler-or-a-jester/.

accomplished and proud of themselves, although others would be shocked to believe or understand this.[12]

The Lost Child (Aliases: "The Quiet One," "The Shy One," "The Independent")

The "lost child" is the family member who retreats from family dysfunction due to feeling overwhelmed. They can spend a lot of time alone, pursue singular interests, and/or struggle to establish or maintain relationships with others.

The Compulsive (Aliases: The Alcoholic, The Drug User)

The compulsive is a family role that is often discussed in substance use treatment. This is the person in the family who struggles with addiction or compulsive behaviors, and because of their constant struggle, which may even lead to criminal activity, they are often the focus of the family's attention. The compulsive can share many traits with the scapegoat, as they are typically identified as the "problem" in the family.[13]

In self-examination and observation of others, I conclude that many people may play more than one role in the family unit. For example, I can see myself as the "enabler" and "hero." My childhood reveals that my siblings and I were sexually molested at a young age. Although I am the second and middle child of my mother's three children from a first marriage, I was always given the role of the oldest child. I became the protector of the other two children. As they became adults, both of my siblings became

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[12] Gregory, "Dysfunctional Family Roles Part 2."

[13] A. Gregory, "Dysfunctional Family Roles Part 3: Are You a Lost Child or A Compulsive?," Symmetry Counseling blog, 2018, https://www.symmetrycounseling.com/family-therapy-chicago/dysfunctional-family-roles-part-3-are-you-a-lost-child-or-a-compulsive/.

substance abusers, one on crack cocaine and the other on opioids. Over the years, I enabled their behavior, sought help for them, and took on the responsibility of their families, even raising their children during bad seasons. Somewhere along the line, this was not of my own desire, but because I was the enabler and hero of the family. This type of responsibility over MY adult siblings became expected by them, MY parents, MY siblings' spouses, and children. This led to me becoming dysfunctional in how I related to my family, and that dysfunctional behavior of taking care of everyone and solving their problems, as I saw my grandmother do. The only way out of such a quandary was for me to seek therapy and learn how to say, "No" and refrain from trying to be the fixer, as well as the enabler and hero to everyone. This is still a work in progress.

Dr. Christi Bartell, a pediatrician who researches beyond the physical health of her patients, including their mental health, shares that she has treated children with ulcers and other stress-related ailments because they have taken on the role of the **e**nabler and hero for their entire family at an early age. Sometimes it is because their parents are dealing with substance abuse or other dysfunctional issues; therefore, the child takes on the parental role to maintain some level of normalcy in the family.[14] Currently, Dr. Bartell works in a private practice in the more affluent area of Charlotte, North Carolina. Her former position was Director of Pediatric Care at the County Department of Health Services in Gastonia, North Carolina. She shared that socio-economic conditions could play a role in the level of dysfunction that is seen on the surface. While working in Gastonia, her target population was marginalized minorities who exhibit dysfunctional behavior outwardly. There, she treated more children who were born addicted to drugs,

[14] Christi Bartell, Interviewed in Oak Island, North Carolina, by Gypsie Murdaugh, on November 22, 2023.

suffered abuse and/or neglect, and were malnourished. She also found that many times it was difficult to address these issues with the parents because they had suffered the same lifestyle issues, and thus the dysfunction was generational and considered just part of the "hand that life had dealt them." She further shared that while serving that population, she found herself more involved with the social issues of the family, because as an African American, she felt the need to invest in other young, single African American mothers.

Dr. Bartell was clear to share that since her population became more of the affluent children in the Myers Park Community of Charlotte, she still sees dysfunction, but it presents itself differently. The behavior is masked more because, many times, the parents are aware of the dysfunction. While addiction and financial issues also exist in this population, it is more difficult for the pediatrician to see. What she does see is more of a lack of control over the children's behavior. When addressing behavior associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder or Oppositional Defiant Disorder, she can see the helplessness of the parent. This, too, can be associated with generational dysfunction. She states that some parents struggle with ways to discipline their child in a healthy manner, either because they were abused as a child and therefore refrain from any type of corporal punishment, even mild spanking or because they themselves were not disciplined or nurtured as a child and therefore they never learned how to discipline their own child. They try to control behavior by giving or withholding material things, and ultimately, that does not work. Thus, if not careful, they will perpetuate an ongoing generational dysfunction in their family unit.[15]

[15] Christi Bartell, Interviewed in Oak Island, North Carolina, by Gypsie Murdaugh, on November 22, 2023.

As we apply this theory of psychology, let us first summarize that this project focused on folk psychology (common sense psychology), and it looked at African and African American psychology as we addressed the issue of dysfunction. Now, let us turn to our foundational chapters and address how this theory interacts with them. The biblical passage is Genesis 37:1-4, wherein the Scripture shares Jacob's love for Joseph and the older brothers' disdain for him:

> Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him (NRSV).

Looking through the lens of psychology, especially folk psychology, we see some real issues in these four verses. First, Jacob/Israel has a favorite son. The Scripture expressly shares that it is because Joseph was born in his old age, but as we look at the make-up of Jacob's family, we also know that Joseph is also the first child of Jacob's beloved, Rachel. While the Scripture does not say more, perhaps that too caused Jacob to have a greater and unique love for Joseph. Also, perhaps that is the reason that the brothers hated him so much. Thus, we see familial dysfunction rearing its ugly head. "Favoritism is common to families; can contribute to depression in both the favored and unfavored child; impacts all family members for life."[16]

The book entitled *The Favorite Child* explains that "favored and unfavored children are vulnerable to depression because there is tension associated with being

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[16] Ellen Weber Libby, "Favoritism Does Exist," *Psychology Today*, July 25, 2010.

chosen as well as not being chosen by the parent important to the child."[17] As depression sets in for both children, it may cause them to develop feelings of jealousy, inferiority, and superiority, and act out on those feelings. In the context, there is a reoccurrence throughout many of the family units that there is a "favorite child" and a "Black sheep" child. It begins to evolve into a dysfunctional household, and those issues live longer than the parents, with some of these issues existing among siblings in their sixties and seventies. This causes them not to have good relationships; therefore, they teach their children not to trust or deal with an aunt, uncle, or cousins; then the grandchildren are taught the same, and the dysfunction continues as it becomes generational. Jacob's favoritism for Joseph enraged his brothers to such a degree that they conspired to kill Joseph and ultimately sold him into slavery. This was generational because the dysfunction of parents having favorites did not start with this generation. Abraham favored Isaac over Ishmael; Rebecca favored Jacob over Esau; and Jacob continued this act of favoring Joseph over all of the other children. This causes depression and feelings of desperation on the part of the favored children and the unfavored ones.

Dr. Cynthia McFadden, a psychotherapist of federal and state prison inmates, shares that she has seen many cases of inmates who blamed their issues and criminal activity on feeling as if they were not one or both parents' favorite. She shared that it is important that parents are intentional about recognizing the uniqueness of each child and make each child feel special in his/her own way. Her twenty-three years of experience in counseling have afforded her the opportunity to hear stories of how families that look much like Jacob's family are composed of overachievers and criminals. Dr. McFadden

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[17] Ellen Weber Libby, "The Favorite Child," *Psychology Today*, January 2010.

shared that she also has a private practice that serves people of all races, cultures, and socio-economic statuses. She stated that this has afforded her the opportunity to see the same level of depression and dysfunction in persons who are high functioning and successful. Some of them deal with the same feelings that her inmate patients deal with, indicating that dysfunction crosses all boundaries.[18] Psychology definitely plays a role in the make-up and evolution of the family unit, and eventually, when dysfunctional families become members of the same church, that dysfunction can affect the context.

As with the biblical foundation, it is imperative that we look at how psychology relates to the historical foundation of the need and establishment of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Even in the 21st Century, students of color are still dealing with racism and classism at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). This is found to cause real psychological issues.

> A study done in 2008 reported that African American student-athletes at a PWI experienced 'feelings of isolation, being misunderstood, powerless, mistrust from teammates and others, being judged, pressured to assimilate to different values, and being stigmatized as Black athletes.' The study went on to show that high rates of depression have previously been found to be positively related to Black students who experience racism, and may suggest that even with moderate levels of social support, student-athletes may still be experiencing psychosocial difficulties due to racism or discrimination.[19]

This type of depression at PWIs does exist. I have been an honor student, professor, and vice president at PWIs, and even in those positions of authority, I have seen and experienced depression brought on by racism and other forms of discrimination.

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[18] Cynthia McFadden, Interviewed by Gypsie Murdaugh in Columbia, South Carolina, on November 20, 2023.

[19] Sabha Abour, "The Benefits of Historically Black Colleges and Universities for Mental Health," Focus for Health Foundation, October 15, 2019.

That level of ongoing mistreatment of people of color is definitely generational, and we must not be oblivious to the fact that when one is dealing with such depression day-to-day, it is difficult not to carry those feelings of depression, inadequacy, anger, and frustration back into the home. I know that I have unconsciously done that, and if not addressed properly, it can begin a dysfunctional atmosphere within the family.

HBCUs have afforded all people opportunities to be students, professors, and administrators in a much more welcoming environment.

> HBCUs are developing more accessible mental health services by providing both in-person and telehealth services, hiring more mental health professionals and counselors of color, implementing early and often mental health screening of students, and establishing collaborations with campus and community partners to serve more students.[20]

Because HBCUs have been intentional about addressing the mental health of their students, in addition to affording more opportunities for Black students to get a good post-secondary education, they have also provided an environment where mental health issues are not frowned upon but directly addressed. This is very important because mental health and counseling have long been tabooed in the African American community, so these students are allowed to think outside of the box and feel comfortable addressing their mental health and thus dysfunctional behavior.

Psychology of the Family

The psychology of the family is also pertinent when delving into the concepts of the Minjung Theology because this theology deals with the oppression and exploitation

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[20] C. Chance, "HBCUs could play role in improving awareness of mental health," *Tally South, 2019*, https://tallysouth.com/2019/03/29/hbcus-could-play-role-in-improving-awareness-of-mental-health/.

of those, specifically Koreans, but all people that are oppressed; it definitely connects to how the psychology of the family unit plays a role. Minjung Theology is a theology that teaches that Christianity plays a stronger role in the psychology of the family and the oppression that occurs in families and the church contexts. Yes, Christians are commissioned to "go ye therefore and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ," but how do we even get non-believers to pause and hear our proclamation of the Word if we do not first meet them where they are in their state of oppression, depression, and dysfunction? There is a popular saying that people "don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." I live and minister by that adage because it is effective in building relationships that open up doors to share the good news.

Like the Koreans who were oppressed, the members of this context have endured oppression from their own families and communities. They are wary of Christians who only quote scriptures, preach, dance, and profess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, but never reach out and help them get the "yoke of oppression" off their necks. The Book of James clearly shares God's view of this way of ministering to the marginalized, broken, and hurting people:

> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:14-17, NRSV).

This type of ministering is not effective, and it does not truly share the love of Jesus Christ. If we are faithful to spend time with God and live out our works of piety, then the least of God's people will be able to benefit from our works of mercy. Too often, the psychology of the family can be made stronger by simply

loving our family members for who they are and not who we want them to be. This type of unconditional love may encourage them to overcome oppression and live above their feelings of inferiority or inadequacy.

Conclusion

When counseling others on dysfunctional behavior, one of the running "jokes" concerns the question of what functional behavior is. When sin entered the world, a level of dysfunction entered along with it - individuals, families, and groups have been combating dysfunction since that time. The initial focus of this research thesis was going to be on overcoming dysfunctional behavior that is seen in the context. Some of these behaviors include classism, alcoholism, addictions, sexual molestation, sexual promiscuity, teen/unwed pregnancies, and domestic violence. Then the imposing thought arose that before victims and perpetrators of this behavior can begin to address their issues, they first need to discern and understand the meaning of dysfunctional behavior. Generational dysfunctional behavior in a family setting can appear normal because the family members do not know how to live any differently. Some would even be offended if the way they lived was classified as dysfunctional. Members of the context would definitely be highly offended and hurt if it were even suggested that some of their behavior is sinful in accordance with the Minjung Theology theory. They easily consider gossip to be a means of "showing concern" about family members, rather than just talking about them. They have long ago learned to protect their family members who demonstrate dysfunctional behavior by keeping such behavior secret. Thus, one stone has killed two birds: save the person's reputation and save the family's image. Part of our

coping mechanisms and survival instincts are to adapt to our environment, especially if that is the only environment that we have known since we were children. Therefore, the study of the psychology of the family is very important in helping us to define and recognize functional and dysfunctional behavior, which we were often exposed to as young children. We never learned that it was wrong, because we saw such behavior being demonstrated by adults who were responsible for teaching us right from wrong. We must first know that something is wrong before we can address it. Bartell and McFadden agree that their most significant challenges have been in trying to treat people emotionally, mentally, and physically when they do not understand that their behavior is wrong. This is where attending colleges, especially HBCUs, is helpful because it allows young people to not only be educated but also be exposed to people outside of their families, churches, and communities. Many times, they learned that people do not need to live the way that they are living, and that there is hope for them to live better and have more functional lives than their parents and grandparents. The psychology of the family is a major step in helping members of the context to understand the meaning of dysfunctional behavior, and then recognize where it exists in their own lives, families, and the life of the church context.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The project was implemented to satisfy the requirements for a doctoral degree and involved six sessions within a six-week period. In each session, ten members of Piney Grove met for the purpose of developing insight and tools to better discern and understand dysfunctional behavior in the family setting. The project's goal was based on the title, "Equipping the Black Church to Discern and Identify Generational Family Dysfunction." The objective was based upon the hypothesis, "if the leaders participate in training to discern dysfunctional behavior, then they will be able to recognize such behavior and help the members to identify the same." The ten participants were key leaders in various aspects of the ministry, and they represented a diverse group of individuals and also brought representation from most of the key families in the church context. The diversity will be addressed in more detail in the body of this chapter. This project served as the first step to addressing the deep issues of generational familial dysfunction in the church and how it affects the context. Also, future work will involve this core group working with the greater membership to help others to better understand what generational dysfunction looks like and how it affects the family unit. Ultimately, this work will lead to Piney Grove in particular, and the Black church in general, being

better equipped to not only discern and identify generational dysfunction but also to implement programs and develop tools to help families overcome such dysfunction.

The project's Ministry Focus shared the story of generational family dysfunction within the context and my life. Although I grew up almost one hundred miles away from the community where Piney Grove is located and never even heard of any of the people in the context, the similarity is mystifying. One of the unique likenesses is that in the church family and community, there is a lot of what will be referred to as "intermarrying." That is where members of one to three families marry each other. More specifically, several siblings of one family marry the siblings of another family. With the exception of two families, this is the story of Piney Grove. Three major families have gone through several generations of marrying each other. Likewise, I was born and bred in the same dynamics. My family situation is even more unique because it is not just siblings and first cousins of one family marrying the siblings and first cousins of another family, but it is the women in the first family marrying the men in the second family. The context has both women and men of one family marrying the women and men of one or both of the other two families. This is relevant in the Ministry Focus chapter and addressed in the project because it is a strong factor in how generational family dysfunction can spread like wildfire when there is a lot of "intermarrying." First, the context strengths include the blessings of family loyalty, the gift of singing well, cooking well, and land ownership, which is very important in the Black community. Most of the members live on their own property, which they inherited. Second, the context members experience the dysfunctions of addictions to alcohol, domestic abuse, child molestation,

and family discourse over land ownership, and because of the "intermarrying," there is no outlet for most people because they are all fruits of the same "poisonous tree."

The Biblical Foundations' text of the project shared the story of the birth of Joseph to Jacob and Rachel and how Jacob loved and favored Joseph from birth. The group further discussed how that same favor caused jealousy among Jacob's sons and how that jealousy grew into hatred for Joseph, which caused his brothers to sell him into slavery. It also shared that such unhealthiness between brothers did not start with Joseph and his brothers, but it was a generational family dysfunction throughout the heirs of Abraham. Abraham's sons, Isaac and Ishmael, were separated young because of the jealousy of Isaac's mother, Sarah. Isaac's son, Jacob, desired the birthright of his older brother, Esau, to such a degree that he and their mother, Rebecca, tricked Isaac into giving Jacob the birthright, causing a violent rift between the brothers. Jacob ended up having children with a wife and two concubines that he did not love before his only beloved, Rachel, gave him Joseph, whom Jacob made no secret that he loved the most, contributing to Joseph's brothers' hatred for him. This pattern showed three generations of dysfunction before it was broken when Joseph forgave and reconciled with his brothers. (See Genesis 45).

The Historical Foundations Chapter of the project discussed the impact of the founding of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). There is a quote that most Black families teach their children, and it is, "education is the key to success." With the founding of colleges for Blacks in the post-slavery period of the late 1860s, Blacks began to overcome the brokenness caused by being enslaved for 400 years, as they gained the ability to read and write. They also learned how to take care of themselves and

their families without depending upon their former masters. The history and impact of four of the “Ivy League” Black colleges were delved into with a closer look at the history of Hampton, Howard, Morehouse, and Spelman. Each school began as a Bible school or seminary to teach Blacks how to study and teach the Bible, and likewise, each school has grown to be a major university in the country that offers degrees in just about every field of study. With family members leaving home and matriculating through these fine institutions of higher learning, they were able to see the world from a different vantage point. They began to recognize that much of the behavior that they experienced while growing up was not healthy, and some was downright dysfunctional. Education presented not only a desire to live differently but also the means to live in a healthier manner.

The Theological Foundations Chapter introduced Minjung Theology, which equips one with the methodology and tools to overcome generational dysfunction and brokenness. It goes beyond Black Liberation Theology, which focuses mainly on the oppression of Black people. Minjung empowers the oppressed to work hard to rise above the state of oppression, take control of their lives and conditions, address their issues, be delivered from such sin, and then move forward as healed people who will stop the curses from affecting future generations.

The Interdisciplinary Foundation Chapter focused on the psychology of the family, which addressed how family units are developed and grown to be either healthy or dysfunctional. This work looked at the different personalities that infiltrate a family, causing some members to feel superior to others, causing some siblings to feel as if they must be the “backbone” of the family, and causing others to feel as if they have no “backbone” or voice in the family unit. It discussed the different types of personalities

that exist in a family and how the co-existence of these personalities can cause dysfunction, jealousy, and even hatred. It also shared how those same differences can cause family members to embrace each other with love, pride, and acceptance of what each member brings to the "family table."

Methodology

The project was held over a seven-week period that included six Saturday sessions that lasted ninety minutes each. The goal was to create a safe and confidential space wherein participants would feel at ease to share their thoughts and feelings. The professional associates were instrumental in giving input regarding how to use the qualitative methodology of questionnaires and journals. Each associate read the foundational chapters and gave feedback. They also extended support in the form of preparing the agendas for each module, offering input on logistics of how to prepare the space where the project was held, and sharing input regarding other logistics that would provide an educationally sound environment throughout the project. The contextual associates set up the space, assisted with preparing meals, and provided support as needed.

Participants were able to choose their own seats and speak openly among themselves during breaks. Each week, a full breakfast was served, highlighting Southern cuisine such as shrimp and grits or chicken and waffles. Upon signing the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B), participants were given a folder, a journal book, and a pen. The folder was used to maintain handouts and any extra notes that the participants wrote down. Participants were encouraged to make journal entries, but they were also

free to use their journal books to make notations, do drawings depicting their thoughts, feelings, and fears, and even doodle if they found that to be a coping or calming mechanism. They were assured that once the journal books were turned in, they would be kept under lock and key, and I would be the only one with access to them.

The participants were current and former leaders of Piney Grove. Over thirty people volunteered to participate, but only ten were selected. As I chose from among the volunteers, I sought to make the group inclusive and diverse, thus creating a group that was representative of the body of the church context. The participants were gathered through personal interviews by me with each one. However, during the private vetting of the participants, I collected their ages, whether they were born or married into the church, etc. The participants were willing to share. Each participant represented one of the major families in the church body. The age range of the participants was from thirty-four to seventy-one years old. In reference to age, two participants were in their thirties, two were in their forties, four were in their fifties, one was in her sixties, and one was seventy-one years old. The gender makeup was six women and four men. Three of the participants were not born and bred in the church but married into the church body, thus bringing in viewpoints of how it felt to be an "outsider" in such a large, family-oriented church, as well as having had a different experience in their own upbringing. Two of the participants no longer live in the church community but commute from about two hours away to still attend their home church and live in metropolitan areas of the state, which afford them a different perspective from rural living. Educational statistics show that one of the participants, the seventy-one-year-old, just graduated with her Adult High School Diploma in 2023; two had Associate Degrees; two had Bachelor's Degrees, and five had

Master's Degrees. Three never left home, and they commuted to and attended a nearby college. Two licensed counselors were in the group and were prepared to provide services if any participant became disturbed due to 'triggering" discussions. Coincidentally, both of these individuals were not born into the context but married into the church family.

The project used the qualitative research method, where words were used to collect, analyze, and share data. These words were collected from the responses of pre- and post-survey questionnaires (see Appendix C and D) being administered, along with two interviews (see Appendix E). In preparing for IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, it was determined that instead of doing a personal one-on-one interview with every participant, volunteers would be requested, and only two would give more in-depth insight into their family history and personal upbringing. There were also three types of research methods instituted: Bible studies, workshop/discussion sessions, and journaling. At four sessions, I served as the facilitator, and two sessions had a clinical psychologist serving as the facilitator. A generic agenda for the modules was used each week. (See Appendix F). The only exception was that Module One began with an orientation and distribution of the questionnaires.

Module One, which was held on July 6, 2024 (9:00-10:30 a.m.), started with orientation and a question/answer session to help the participants better understand the project, the details of the foundation chapters, and the expectations of the participants. Participants were given a pre-project questionnaire that set a baseline of the understanding of familial dysfunction and its existence in the participants' families and the church context. The first three questions of the questionnaire were general identifying questions. Question four asked the participants to give a definition of dysfunction based

on their own knowledge, not a dictionary definition. Question five asked the participants to share any dysfunction in the family that they have been able to discern, past and present. Question six asked the participants if they had seen evidence of such dysfunction within the church context, and if so, share the content in detail. The second half of Module One was a discussion on the lineage of Abraham to give the background to the biblical text.

Modules Two and Three, which were held on July 13th and 20th, 2024 (9:00-10:30 a.m.), began with the introduction of the guest facilitator, who holds the following degrees: Bachelor's Degree in Psychology, Master's Degree in Counseling, and Doctor of Philosophy degree. She is a National Certified Counselor and a Licensed Professional Counselor. She holds many accolades and awards and has spent the last thirty-plus years making great strides in family, children, and juvenile counseling. Her workshop was entitled "Understanding and Addressing Family Dysfunction" and was presented during both Modules Two and Three.

Modules Four and Five were facilitated by me and held on July 27th and August 3rd, 2024 (9:00-10:30 a.m.). I led the discussion in the application of what had been learned in the previous modules to two biblical texts. Module Four was the teaching and discussion of the main text from the Biblical Foundations Chapter, Genesis 37:1-4. Module Five was the teaching and discussion of Genesis 45:1-7.

Module Six, also led by me on August 10, 2024 (9:00-10:30 a.m.), consisted of a discreet and intense discussion about generational family dysfunction that existed in the families represented. More explicitly, this module was used to give the participants a safe space and allocated time to openly share about some of the dysfunction that they had not

only experienced in their lifetimes but also dysfunction that they were aware of that existed in former generations. This module was very important to the overall project because it was used as a means to determine if the participants better understood generational dysfunctional behavior after participating in the prior modules and if they had gained any tools to help them better discern and identify such behavior.

Module Six concluded with the participants completing the post-survey questionnaire. Question one was a second request for the participants to define generational familial dysfunction after being educated through the modules of the project. Questions two and three were about whether the participants felt able to identify generational dysfunction and discern dysfunctional behavior. Question four asked if the participants could recognize and name behavior that needed to be changed by them or their family members. Question five asked if the participants felt better equipped to help the church members be able to discern and identify dysfunctional behavior. Question six asked for a summary of learning regarding the entire project. This was the last official meeting of the participants.

As shared above, two of the ten participants were interviewed in depth to discuss some major areas of family dysfunction. Only two participants were chosen because it was not necessary to interview everyone in this detailed manner. This is because most of the participants were related, and so I could get an inside look at the family dynamics from the two participants who represented the experience of the total group. These interviews were held on August 12, 2024, and August 15, 2024. Unlike the questionnaires that asked general questions, the interviews were more personal and asked for some specifics regarding generational family dysfunction that the participants had

actually discerned. Each interview delved into how long the participant realized that the dysfunction was occurring, and the symptoms that were exhibited. The interviewees were very open and engaging and shared a great deal about what they had experienced in their own homes (the ones that they were reared in and the homes where they presently served as the parent or leader). The final question was an open-ended one regarding the interviewee's feelings about being equipped to address the dysfunction in their families and in their individual homes.

Implementation

The project was implemented in person at Piney Grove. The church was off limits during the time that the project sessions were being implemented, and that request was honored all six Saturdays that we met. The generic agenda was shared on the monitors in the church and not given out in hard copies. There were handouts for Modules Four and Five. Modules Two and Three were presented by PowerPoint without any handouts. The setting was intentionally relaxed, with meals being served and snacks being welcome. Due to the nature of the project subject matter, this type of setting was chosen in order to help the participants relax as they discussed some difficult topics. Logistically, the setting was a round table to help develop intimacy and alleviate some of the boundaries that would hinder discussion. Participants were free to stand when needed and position themselves in the manner that they found most comfortable, without disrupting others or the setting.

Module One began with all ten participants attending; however, after the orientation, one participant had to leave. This first module was focused on helping the

participants to understand the vision of the project, the foundation of the doctoral thesis, the goals of the project, and the roles and expectations of the participants. The module began with some logistics being done. Each participant had already been given an Informed Consent Form the week before and asked to return it at the first gathering. Questions regarding the Informed Consent Form had already been answered, and the floor was opened for additional questions. There being none, the forms were signed and collected. For information only, initially, some of the more prevalent and pressing questions dealt with confidentiality, storage of questionnaires and journals, and, rather, this was a truly safe space to openly share. Another major question was how I would use the data collected, as I protected the privacy of the participants. The participants were assured that they would remain anonymous.

Once the logistics were handled, this orientation module continued with an explanation of the purpose and goal of the project. The project was six weeks (six consecutive Saturdays) and ninety minutes per module or session. The purpose of the project was to help ten church leaders in the context learn how to discern and identify generational family dysfunction. The hypothesis was that if the ten leaders who participated in the program learned how to detect the signs of family dysfunction, then they could help other members of their families and the church context to discern and identify the same. This was also the goal of the project; that is, to successfully teach indicators of generational family dysfunction.

Next, there was a brief discussion on the plight of generational family dysfunction, and how I, as the church context's pastor, have observed it seeping into the crevices of the context, making ministry sometimes challenging. I allocated about ten

minutes to summarize and explain each foundational paper. The participants were outwardly intrigued with the foundational work, especially the historical foundation work on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Three of the participants are graduates of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University, a southern HBCU. The participants were also intrigued with the Minjung Theology, mostly because they had never heard of it, and they found the Korean oppression and struggles to be interesting and discussion-provoking. There was a heavy discussion about the difference between Minjung Theology and Black Liberation Theology. Two of the participants were familiar with Black Liberation Theology, but again, none had heard of Minjung Theology. Participants were further intrigued by the fact that Minjung Theology identifies oppression as sin and that it also extends into ways that the oppressed can be empowered to be victors. They were also surprised that Black Liberation Theology had not gone to that extent, but seemingly left the oppressors, complaining about the oppression, but not rising up to overcome it. Afterward, the interdisciplinary paper's topic of the psychology of the family was discussed. I made this part of the discussion more interactive by having the participants identify where they fit into their own family demographics. (For example, if a participant was an only child, oldest, middle, or youngest child). Also discussed was if the participant considered him or herself to be a leader or follower in the family; and finally, if the participant considered him or herself to be a favorite or "Black sheep" in the family unit. I went into some detail about the personality types, identity types, and interaction of the family, as well as how all of these could contribute to dysfunction. Some of the questions from Module One were addressed during the modules with the clinical psychologist.

The second half of Module One was led by me and was an in-depth study on the main text of the Biblical Foundations, Genesis 37:1-4. I chose to use an interactive method of facilitation by inviting the participants to share their views on the text and the lineage of Abraham up to the birth of Joseph. The fact is that some of the participants were avid students of the Word and had studied the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was rewarding and made the discussion rich. In order for the participants to be able to see how the dysfunction between Joseph and his brothers could be generational, I took the discussion back to the promise to Abraham to be a father of many nations; the promise to Sarah and him to have a child; and the birth of Ishmael. The Bible study continued with the birth of Isaac, the sending away of Ishmael, and Isaac's marriage to Rebecca and the fatherhood of Esau and Jacob. The dysfunctional relationship of those two brothers, the favoritism of Isaac for Esau and Rebecca for Jacob, as well as Jacob's deceit, were discussed in depth. The discussion further looked at the fleeing of Jacob, the trickery of Laban, and Jacob's love for Rachel above Leah, his first wife, and his concubines Bilhah and Zilpah, who were all the mothers of his first ten children. The participants knew the individual story of this early biblical family, but they had never looked at how the issues of each generation were all connected. It was as if light bulbs began to go off in some of the participants' minds as they began to discuss how, by the same token, they could connect the dots in their own family history.

Modules Two and Three were led by the guest facilitator, the clinical psychologist, on July 13th and 20th, 2024. Her two-part workshop was entitled "Understanding and Addressing Family Dysfunction" and was presented by a PowerPoint Presentation. All ten of the participants attended both modules and were fully engaged.

The facilitator opened with sharing the definition of a dysfunctional family as "one that is characterized by conflict, misbehavior, or abuse, which can be seen in behaviors, addictions, perfectionism, abuse or neglect, unpredictability or fear, conditional love, lack of boundaries, lack of intimacy, and poor communication."[1] She further shared that "Dysfunctional families tend to contribute to mental health issues, low achievements, self-esteem issues, and personality disorders, and this tends to be transgenerational, passing down from one family unit to another."[2]

The facilitation technique was very interactive; therefore, the participants were encouraged to engage in the discussion and share their own testimonials and feedback. At this junction in the project, they felt more comfortable with the group as a whole, as an assurance of confidentiality and a judgment-free zone became established. They began to open up more about the dysfunction that they had already been able to discern in their own families. The facilitator proffered a discussion by sharing the signs of family dysfunction: Communication Issues, Role Confusion, Boundaries and Rules, Emotional Dynamics, Behavioral Patterns, Family Cohesion, and Parenting Styles. [3]

The participants shared personal experiences as they recognized signs of dysfunction within their families. Participant Nine stated that much of their family dysfunction stemmed from communication issues. They observed this problem in their

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[1] Mental Health America, "Is My Family Dysfunctional?", https://screening.mhanational.org/content/my-family-dysfunctional/#:~:text=A%20dysfunctional%20family%20is%20characterized.your%20thoughts%20and%20feelings%20freely.

[2] Guest Facilitator, "Understand and Addressing Family Dysfunction," Workshop Presentation, July 20 and 27, 2024, Greater Piney Grove UMC, Maxton, North Carolina.

[3] Guest Facilitator, "Understand and Addressing Family Dysfunction," Workshop Presentation, July 20 and 27, 2024, Greater Piney Grove UMC, Maxton, North Carolina.

grandparents' and parents' relationships, which had filtered down into most family relationships, causing significant emotional dynamics and challenges. Participant Two also noted massive communication issues in their grandparents' and parents' relationships. They mentioned not realizing how much this affected them until they saw the same issues in their own marriage, which ended in divorce. They acknowledged that while their spouse was also at fault for the marriage breakdown, both had communication issues. Furthermore, they noticed this lack of constructive communication in their ex-spouse's parents' relationship.

As she focused on the project's focus of equipping the church leaders/participants to discern dysfunction, the facilitator extended the discussion for more participants to share dysfunction that they had already recognized before the project began. Some more shared that they saw issues with parenting styles and behavioral patterns. Participant Three was very outspoken about the addictive behavior that they not only saw in their own family but in other families in the church. This participant stated that they could already see some of this behavior in the youth as they exhibited addiction to video games, telephones, and food. This participant also felt that out of all the signs of dysfunction that were listed, this was the one that kept being "swept under the rug" and not addressed by family members or the church.

All of the participants felt like they saw very few problems with family cohesion; however, as I listened to the discussion, it sounded a little more complicated. While the participants admitted that siblings and cousins did not always get along, they took pride in sharing that, regardless of the family issues, if anyone had a problem, all of the family members came together to support that person. This distinction seemed to raise another

question: “What does healthy family cohesion look like?” When that question was presented to the group, participants asked the facilitator and me to discuss more about healthy family cohesion. I shared that this would be further discussed in Module Five.

In Module Three, the facilitator focused on the common characteristics of dysfunctional families and their impacts. She shared that the common characteristics of dysfunction are substance abuse, conflict-driven, violent, authoritarian, emotionally detached, poor communication, and lack of empathy. This session opened with a discussion that was more triggering than former discussions. Some of the participants had memories of alcoholism and drug addiction in the family. Note that we had the clinical psychologist, who is also a licensed counselor, plus two more counselors in the room. With those professionals present, we paused at that time to discuss the triggers. Most of the participants shared their triggers right then in the group setting. One participant requested to leave the group and meet with me for pastoral counseling because I had counseled that person in the past regarding the matter that was triggered. We briefly stepped aside to discuss the trigger and how to deal with it, and after that, the participant felt better and was prepared to continue the module.

The discussion then turned to address the church’s response to family dysfunction. Eight out of the ten participants felt that there was a lack of empathy in the church body, and such was due to a lack of empathy in the individual family units. This data was gathered on the spot during the discussion, as the question was asked, and the participants responded. All of the participants felt that since I became the pastor, there had been much more teaching and preaching regarding the need for members of the church and residents of the community to show each other compassion and empathy.

This discussion was a perfect opening to the facilitator's segment on "The Role of Church Leadership," which is the crux of the hypothesis. She shared that overall, church leaders are in a great position to give holistic support to their members and families, which can help them to address issues of generational familial dysfunction by addressing their spiritual, emotional, and practical needs. She went on to state that by doing so, the church can provide a safe haven and supportive environment where people can heal, become stronger, and thrive in the face of challenges.[4] This answered a question that the participants asked in Module One, "How can we as leaders help the members to discern generational family dysfunction?" At that time, the question was premature, but by Module Three, with the facilitator's expertise, they began to answer their own question. Participant Eight shared that they had already pointed out dysfunction to their family members, and usually in the moment that it occurred. They stated that it had been their experience that if they did not, the family would "conveniently" act as if they could not recall what was being pointed out.

The facilitator ended her presentation with the following recommendations for leaders to use as they prepared to share what they learned from the project with church members, as well as members of their individual families:

- Effective Communication.
- Open Dialogue: Foster an environment where family members feel safe to express their feelings and concerns without fear of judgment or retaliation.
- Active Listening: Teach family members to listen attentively and empathetically to each other, validating their experiences and emotions.
- Establish Boundaries and Structure.

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[4] Guest Facilitator, "Understand and Addressing Family Dysfunction," Workshop Presentation, July 20 and 27, 2024, Greater Piney Grove UMC, Maxton, North Carolina.

- Healthy Boundaries: Encourage family members to set and respect healthy boundaries to prevent overstepping and ensure personal space and autonomy.

- Consistent Routines: Create and maintain consistent daily routines to provide a sense of stability and predictability for all family members.

- Know Your Resources:

- Substance Abuse Treatment: Seek appropriate treatment and support for any family members struggling with substance abuse.

- Mental Health Support: Provide access to mental health services for family members dealing with mental health issues.

- Addressing Trauma: Engage with trauma-informed care to address past trauma and its impact on the family dynamics.[5]

Module Four was held at the church on July 27, 2024 (9:00-11:30 a.m.). After questions were answered, the module focused on the main text used in the Biblical Foundation, Genesis 37:1-4. It was modified somewhat to incorporate a more in-depth discussion of that chapter, which ends with Joseph's brothers selling him. A hand-out was shared with some key points of discussion regarding the text (see Appendix G). The participants did an interactive exercise entitled, "If Joseph was my brother, what would I have done?" Here, we did an exercise wherein each participant was able to answer the question. The results are shown in Figure 1:

[5] Guest Facilitator, "Understand and Addressing Family Dysfunction," Workshop Presentation, July 20 and 27, 2024, Greater Piney Grove UMC, Maxton, North Carolina.

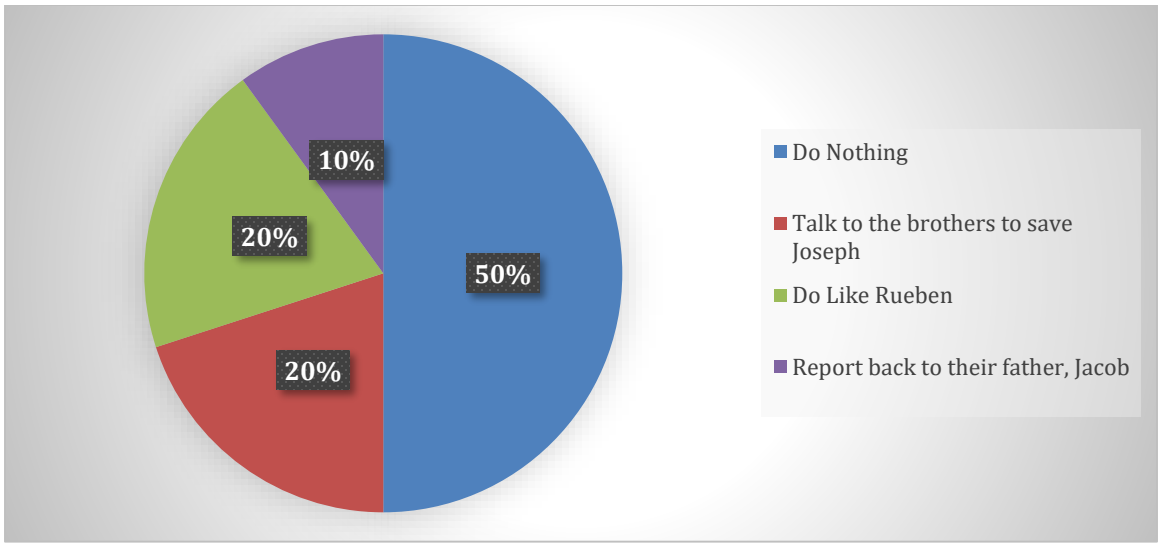

Figure 1. Action

This question was an opening to a later discussion of how a person can discern and possibly address dysfunction in the family setting. It takes into consideration that the participants had already deemed Jacob's family to be a dysfunctional one. Some creative licensure was given, so all the women in the group were deemed male for the purpose of the exercise, as consideration was given that there were ten brothers and that women did not have any power during the time that was being reenacted. I led the discussion by going step by step through what happened on the day that Joseph was sold. The discussion included questions about Joseph's knowledge or lack of knowledge regarding his family history, or even the details of his father's house. An in-depth discussion was held regarding why the brothers hated Joseph to the extent that they would want him dead, and if such dysfunctional behavior had even been detected in any of the participants' families.

For the purpose of the exercise, the participants imagined themselves to be one of the brothers, and they began to share how they might have responded differently and in what way. One participant asked if age mattered, and if so, would the younger brothers

have been able to do anything? I shared that age probably would have been a strong factor, especially during the time of the passage; however, for the purpose of the activity, age would not be a factor. With that answered, the participants started to share different choices that they would have made. Another participant shared that he would have told his brothers not to pay Joseph any attention. He also shared that this is how he addresses issues in his own family. Because he does not like confrontations or conflict, he has always encouraged his siblings not to follow up on anything negative, and likewise, that is how he raised his children: to just not pay each other attention, thus avoiding arguments and addressing issues. A third participant shared that she would have definitely addressed the matter because she has never been the type of person to back down from confrontations. She said that she would not have harmed Joseph, but she certainly would have asked him to explain his dreams. She further stated that she probably would have had a one-on-one with Joseph to talk some more without the others listening. This participant further shared that she is not oblivious to the dysfunction in her own family, and she is known as the sibling who will step forward to address issues. She stated that it is her belief that to do otherwise is to breed dysfunction. The other participants shared a few thoughts but did not go into any detail.

Regarding the discussion resulting from the exercise, one insight is that immediately upon hearing the question, all of the participants agreed that they would not have plotted to kill their brother. The question arose about the poisonous venom of jealousy, and that it could make siblings want to hurt one another. The general consensus was that jealousy can be very dangerous, and some of the participants admitted that they have seen jealousy hurt a family setting, even sibling relationships. They shared that

while they have never seen it come to wanting someone dead, they do know of siblings or cousins who do not deal with each other at all, and they believe that it stems from jealousy. The question also arose whether a parent or parents were the seed of the jealousy. A participant stated that in their mother's family, they do believe that their grandmother showed favoritism and that even years after the grandmother's death, there was still discord between some of the siblings of that generation. The participant further stated that the belief is the reason why their mother has always been very intentional about treating all her children the same. Other participants stated that they had seen the same behavior in their immediate families. When considering the question of what they would have done, they all shared that they would have talked the brothers out of killing Joseph. Most stated that they would have done what Reuben did and tried to work out some way to save Joseph.

They were asked the question, "Should Reuben, especially as the oldest, have just told his other brothers that they were not going to harm Joseph in any manner, and then taken the young boy back home to his father?" The participants who were from very large families (more than ten siblings) stated that they understood Reuben, and they may have handled it the same way in order to stay in good standing with the other brothers. Participant Six was from a much smaller immediate family and stated that she would not have cared what the others thought of her; she would have taken Joseph home. Some of the others shared with her that because her family was small, she did not understand the dynamics of big families, and no one definitely wanted to trade places with Joseph and be the hated one, so standing up for him would be difficult.

Module Five was held on August 3, 2024, and focused on a Bible study on Genesis 45:5-7.

> **5**And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. **6**For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. **7**God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors (Genesis 45:5-7, NRSVA).

This passage opened up discussion about how Joseph's family, the sons of Jacob, and the generations of Abraham finally entered into a healthy relationship with each other. It was unanimously agreed upon that forgiveness was what broke the curse that had been the source of jealousy, trickery, betrayal, and ultimately thoughts of murder and the sale of a brother into slavery. It was Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers that showed them what healthy, family love looked like. While they feared him, he reached out to help them, and that type of love, forgiveness, acceptance, and reconciliation is exactly what every participant desires for their families.

The following quote from James Montgomery Boice was discussed.

> He was loved and hated, favored and abused, tempted and trusted, exalted and abased. Yet at no point in the one-hundred-and-ten-year life of Joseph did he ever seem to get his eyes off God or cease to trust him. Adversity did not harden his character. Prosperity did not ruin him. He was the same in private as in public. He was a truly great man.[6]

The participants had varied views on this and some could even relate to the brothers' dislike of Joseph, stating that they saw Joseph as arrogant and thinking that he was better or more gifted than his brothers. This opened up more discussion about people in their own families that had what they considered a "Joseph complex".

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[6] James Montgomery Boice, "Genesis: Living by Faith" (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2006), 204.

As the Module was continued the participants were given a quick oral survey about their own level of forgiveness if they were in Joseph's position. Their responses were as seen in Figure 2:

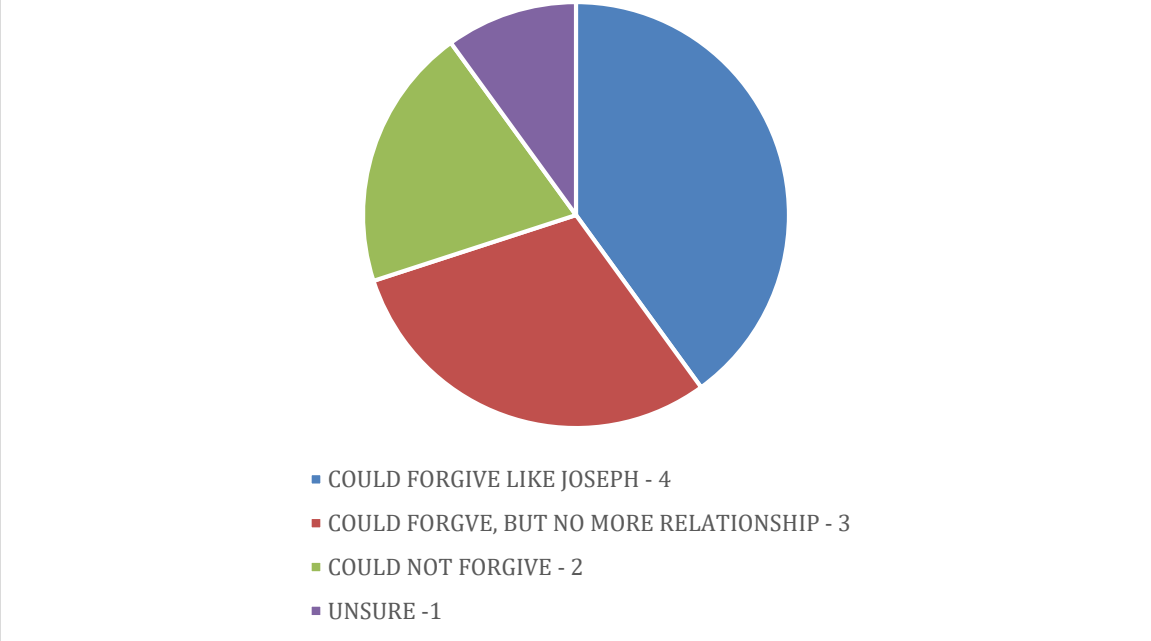

Figure 2. Forgiveness

During the fifth week, I interviewed two of the participants, and their answers and understandings will be shared in the Summary of Learning section of this chapter.

Module Six was held on August 10, 2024 (9:00-11:30 a.m.), and all ten of the participants attended. At the beginning of the module, the study of the text from Genesis 45 was concluded, and journal entries were shared. This module was dedicated to an open discussion about what the participants had learned and mechanisms that they, as church leaders, could use to share this information with other members of their individual families and the church context. Also, with most of the participants being related either by blood or marriage, there were some observations about revelations that had occurred during the project. Participants had built a confidential and comfortable safe space where

they felt open to share that while they were close family members, and some even next door neighbors, they did not realize what was happening behind every closed door. Also in this module, participants were given the opportunity to share some of their journal entries. Some felt free to share, and others did not. In fact, only three of the ten participants, roughly 30%, felt open to sharing. However, as I reviewed the journals, I found that some shared their entries in the open discussions. Also, they shared with each other ways that they could work together to help the members of the church and their families to discern and recognize dysfunction. There was a consensus that most people do not want to live dysfunctional lives, and if they could first discern and acknowledge the dysfunction, then they would be more open to trying to do something to eradicate it in their households and the church family.

Summary of Learning

After spending six weeks pouring out and being poured into, I personally found this project to be very informative. As stated in Chapter One, I also come from a dysfunctional family that deals with addictions, molestation, and domestic abuse (more emotional and verbal than physical). Therefore, I not only sat as a facilitator in this project but also as a student, as I learned from our guest facilitator and from the participants themselves. The best way to share a Summary of Learning is to look at each module and how the participants responded in their discussion and journals about what they learned. Also, the results of the post-project questionnaire and the answers to the interview questions will be shared.

Module One began with an orientation and an overview of the foundational chapters. The participants shared that they learned from each foundational paper. The biblical passage and supporting passages were studied in depth in Modules One and Four. All of the participants were African American, and they were very open to learning more about the four HBCUs that were discussed in the historical chapter. The schools that were discussed were Hampton, Howard, Morehouse, and Spelman. Some of the participants shared that they considered attending one or more of these highly esteemed institutions of higher education. They were very excited to learn about the origin of these universities and expressed that they did not know that all of them began as Bible schools and then ventured into academic studies. As the participants were introduced to the Minjung Theology, they first stated that they had never heard of this Korean theology, and they agreed that racism and oppression should be identified as sin. They asked a great many questions regarding Minjung and again recognized that Minjung empowers the oppressed to work hard to rise above the state of oppression and take control of their lives and conditions.

Regarding the psychology of the family, they learned a lot about the roles that they play in their individual family sections. All participants were encouraged to identify with one of the roles as they learn to discern dysfunctional behavior. We also discussed that some roles in and of themselves were not dysfunctional, but when that role is part of a family unit, it can contribute to dysfunction. For example, the hero is a perfectionist and an overachiever. That role has admirable qualities, but it can cause inferiority and intimidation, and siblings are made to feel inadequate in comparison. I could identify with this role and how my parents told my siblings that they needed to be more like me.

This bred resentment, especially from my sister, who always struggled in school and exhibited behavior problems. Roles in the family can differ, as shown in Figure 3:

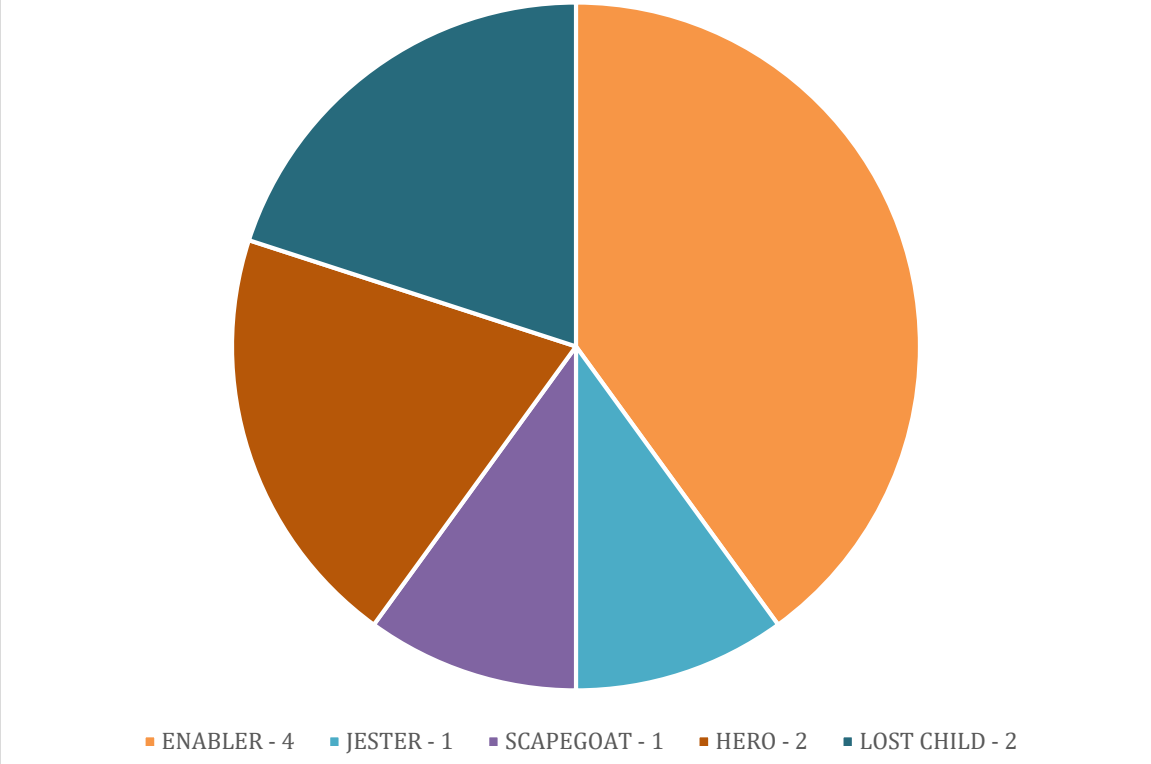

Figure 3. Dysfunctional Roles in the Family

As we discussed the roles of the enabler, jester, scapegoat, hero, lost child, and compulsive, please note that no one considered themselves to be a compulsive; that is, a person who usually struggles with substance abuse issues and other unhealthy coping mechanisms. As these roles were further discussed in module one and revisited in module two with the guest facilitator, participants sometimes changed the way that they identified themselves before we had this discussion. For example, Participant Five shared that she had always seen herself as the hero, one who uses success, perfectionism, and/or achievement in order to cope. However, as the oldest child, she could also see herself as an enabler. She stated that she was a caregiver, a protector, and a rescuer. One who is usually given or undertakes and manages intense responsibilities and obligations. She

shared that she and two of her sisters were victims of sexual molestation by their mother's boyfriend. As an early teenager who finally told a family member, which ultimately led to them being removed from the home and the danger, she felt like a hero. However, as an adult who still is the one who constantly helps her adult siblings with their financial problems when they mismanage their own funds, or the one who is expected to take care of children, when she has none of her own, she now sees that she is more of an enabler and all of her siblings depend upon her to support their unhealthy behavior and lifestyles.

Most of the participants could really see themselves in more than one role. Participant Seven stated that his role changed depending on the different eras of his life, and even present day, depending on the circumstances. He purposefully identified himself as a "lost child" because he was intentional about removing himself and his immediate family (wife/children) from the dysfunction of the extended family. His wife was also a participant, and she agreed with him and stated that World War III could be going on in his family, and she and their children would never know about it, because he rarely shared anything with them about family problems. However, he admitted that he was an enabler for one of his brothers who always needed rescuing.

In Modules Two and Three, the participants opened up to the guest facilitator and shared much about their individual family make-ups. They also learned how to identify or give a "name" to dysfunctional behavior that they exhibited or saw in family members. I found it humorous when several of the participants shared that their grandparents used to use a term that my paternal grandmother always used. After observing the behavior of a person, our ancestors would say, "That's one peculiar child." I recalled asking my

grandmother what she meant by that, and she only responded that she could not quite verbalize the oddity, but something was “not quite right” about the person. As stated in the Implementation, the guest facilitator used an interactive style of teaching, and the participants were very responsive and open to share. The facilitator shared that the brain is a phenomenal organ and the greatest computer in the world. She stated that it is designed to record everything, including all that you see, hear, smell, feel, taste, think, and experience. She further stated that during traumatization, the brain goes into survival mode and starts to reserve some of its energy to keep you alive. Therefore, the brain starts to shut down the aspects of its functioning that are not paramount for survival, so it can focus solely on sending signals to the heart and other vital organs to keep the person alive. With the brain focusing on survival, it stops blocking out memories that one may have forgotten in order to mentally cope. Now, those memories return in flashbacks and start triggering a person as if the trauma is happening right in the moment that the memory returns.

Flashbacks are the brain’s way to remind a person that there is a “recording” that has not been processed, and some people keep shutting it down. When this occurs, people may start experiencing anxiety, loss of appetite, withdrawal, and other mechanisms to keep from facing old memories. All of the participants were totally engaged in her explanation, and the two counselors in the group stated that her explanation was the best that they had ever heard. The participants shared that they could fully identify with her. Participant Nine stated that dysfunction is a way to try to put things into a perspective that one can control. This participant is a counselor and shared that this is seen in clients. In a journal entry, a participant shared that the facilitator’s explanation of how the brain

works and deals with trauma was very helpful and could be used to help family members and church members deal with trauma. The participant wrote that if people can give meaning and context to things that occur in their lives, then they may be less likely to blame themselves for the bad things that happen to them and, therefore, be less likely to fall into a state of dysfunctional behavior.

The facilitator shared that the church does have a role in helping its members to discern and identify dysfunction and ultimately address and eradicate it, too. She stated that the church is in a unique position to offer holistic support to those who have spiritual, emotional, and practical needs by providing a safe and supportive environment. Moreover, churches can help individuals identify their dysfunctional behavior, thus helping families to heal from dysfunction and then thrive in spite of the issues.[7] She challenged the participants to commit to continue working as a group of leaders to help their family members and church members to name and overcome the dysfunction. She offered a tool for them to use to first complete themselves and then for us as church leaders to use as we share what we learned with the other leaders who were not part of the project. The tool is a genogram. A genogram is "a pictorial display of a person's position in their family's hereditary and ongoing relationships. It goes beyond a traditional family tree by allowing the user to visualize social patterns and psychological factors that punctuate relationships, especially patterns that repeat over the generations."[8] The guest facilitator went in-depth to explain to the participants the symbols used in the

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[7] Guest Facilitator, "Understand and Addressing Family Dysfunction," Workshop Presentation, July 20 and 27, 2024, Greater Piney Grove UMC, Maxton, North Carolina.

[8] H. Friedman, M. Rohrbaugh, S. Krakauer, "The Time-Line Genogram: Highlighting Temporal Aspects of Family Relationships," *Family Process* 27, no. 353 (1988): 293-303.

genogram. Time did not allow for the participants to complete their genograms, but she gave them some examples from her own genogram to help them understand how to do theirs.

As shared above, Module Four focused on a Bible Study of Genesis 37, with a specific focus on verses 1-4. The discussion included some background on the culture of Joseph's time and people. Participants began to share their own bible knowledge as the handout was covered. A great deal of responses and viewpoints were given as follows: Discussion Questions:

i. Did Joseph have any knowledge about the dysfunction of his father's family lineage?

ii. Being so young, did Joseph know the truth about his own father's household?

iii. By sharing his dreams, was Joseph trying to act superior or more gifted than his brothers?

iv. What was the true cause of the brothers' hatred of Joseph?
   - Jacob's favoritism
   - The gift of the coat of many colors
   - The view that Jacob loved Rachel, Joseph's mother more than he loved theirs

Looking at each bullet, the participants were open to sharing. First, they all believed that Joseph did not know the history of his father's family and probably did not know much of what was happening in the house where he lived. As a result of a discussion in Module Two, the participants shared that children did not know adult business the way they do now. All but four of the participants are parents who are still raising children, and they believe that secrecy in a family can be the culprit of dysfunction, which was elaborated upon by the guest facilitator. They stated they are more open to talking to their children about subject matters that their parents would never discuss with them. They shared that they could only imagine how little a boy living in Joseph's time really knew about life in

general. Participants shared that with social media, television, and the internet, their children are exposed to a lot, and they have found that it is best that they teach their children the "facts of life," which include self-preservation, healthy relationship building, financial literacy, conflict resolution, and more. The participants' education and work experience afford them a great deal of knowledge and wisdom, and they stated that they found that, like secrecy, ignorance is another culprit of dysfunction. Therefore, they believe in teaching their children more than they were taught by their parents. Again, they could not imagine living in Joseph's time, with no telephones, television, or internet. The two older participants, who are both in their early 70s, shared that because their families were poor, they did not have telephones or televisions when they were growing up. They both recalled not having the items until the 60s, when they were teenagers and almost ready to leave home. They agreed with the younger participants that secrecy and ignorance definitely play a role in dysfunctional behavior, and their strongest insight was that they wish they had known a lot of what they learned from participating in the project. They stated that they ran their homes the same way that their mothers did, and that was not always the best way to live or raise their children.

When discussing the other questions, some of the participants believed that depending upon how he shared his dreams, Joseph could have been considered arrogant, and such a view of him was only fueled by Jacob's favoritism. They stated that favoritism was also a culprit of dysfunction because it bred feelings of superiority for the ones who are favored and inferiority for the ones who are not favored. One of the participants was an only child, but he saw favoritism from his grandparents regarding their grandchildren. He shared that while growing up, it never bothered him, because he was the one that was

favored, but as an older person, he could see that it did cause some dysfunctional behavior, because some of his cousins felt inferior to him, even though he did nothing to make them feel that way.

From the activity, the participants were asked the question, "If I were Joseph's brother, what would I have done?" Again, this question regards the plotting to kill and ultimately selling of Joseph into slavery. Upon sharing, discussing, and studying the scripture, participants were asked to choose from four options on how they would have acted if they were one of the brothers on that long-ago day, when Joseph was betrayed. Again below, I have documented the results in Figure 1:

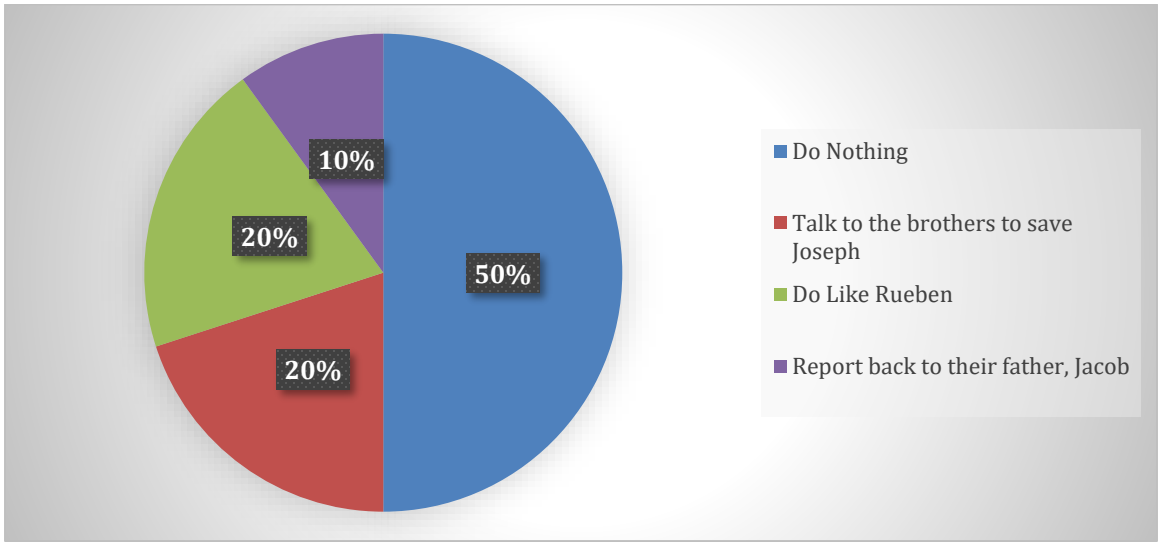

Figure 1. Action

Note that five participants, who were 50%, said that they would do nothing. I pointed out that while all of the brothers have been blamed for what happened to Joseph, the majority probably just did nothing at all. We briefly discussed the viewpoint that doing nothing is just as bad as doing a bad act. Some agreed and some did not. Only one participant stated

that she would have told Jacob what happened. The rest stated that they would not have, because they felt as if that would be futile, since they had no way of finding Joseph.

Module Five continued the biblical discussions, and the participants found hope in Genesis 45:5-7. They shared their views on the power of forgiveness and grace. They shared that they have found that failure to forgive can not only lead to dysfunction but also feed it for generations. The participants discussed that they have seen children from generation to generation have issues with their aunts and uncles because their parents and grandparents had issues and did not forgive. One pondered whether or not Joseph's children knew their father's story, and if they did, were there issues with them forgiving. The consensus was that his children probably would not know because adults did not share such stories with children during that era. There was some emphasis placed on the fact that adults today talk too much in front of children, thus causing the dysfunction to infect future generations. The discussion ended with the thought that the brothers' humility and Joseph's forgiveness and grace served as evidence that generational curses can be broken if family members are treated as Christ-like.

Module Six was spent sharing journal entries, discussing the pre- and post-project questionnaires, and wrapping up the project. I gave the two participants who were interviewed the opportunity to share what was discussed in their questionnaire. One of the participants shared that she always struggled with the dysfunction of her parents' marriage, but ultimately ended up with the same issues in her own marriage that played a significant role in her divorce. She is related to eight of the nine other participants and assumed that they knew about the dysfunction in her family's direct line, but none of them were aware. She stated that the project helped her identify some deep-rooted

dysfunction that her family experienced. This participant also shared that she never made the parallel between her parents' behavior and the behavior of their children. This project helped her to look beyond the present generation and begin to see a pattern from former generations.

The other participant who was interviewed was really open throughout the project and did not have much new to share. However, she did state that before this project, she had never considered the dysfunction of her siblings and herself to be generational, but she, too, could see some patterns from not only their parents but also other older family members. She could also see it in the generations behind her when she looked at the behavior of her child, as well as her nieces and nephews. Out of all of the participants, this one felt very comfortable addressing generational family dysfunction with her family members and assisting the pastor of the church with workshops to address it within the church body.

As I read the journals, I realized that most of the entries were shared during the discussion times. One of the entries that stood out was when Participant Four shared that while they knew that their family had very deep problems, they had never heard the word dysfunction, and so they did not know how to identify the addiction, molestation, and domestic violence that they saw in their family. This participant's answers were "none" to most of the post-project questionnaire inquiries. However, they shared in their journal that during the project, they attended a family reunion, and it seemed as if a light bulb went off as they sat and observed three generations of their family. They stated that they saw behavior that was definitely dysfunctional, and they saw it not only in their adult

siblings but also in their children and grandchildren. As they further observed the extended family members that were at the reunion, they could see more of the same.

Upon looking at the post-questionnaires, the participants' knowledge and preparation grew as shown in Figure 4:

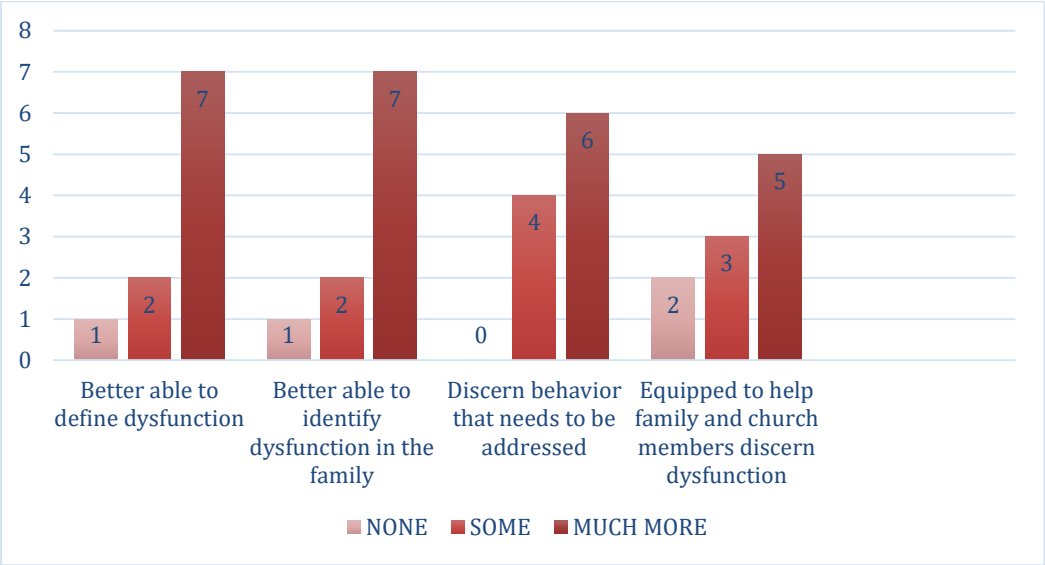

Figure 4. Post-Questionnaire Results Knowledgeable & Prepared

Conclusion

In conclusion, upon looking at all aspects of this project, I consider it to be very successful. First, the subject matter is taboo in most cultures and definitely in the Black community in general. I saw that in this church context, in particular, especially because everyone is related, people are many times inclined to desire the appearance that all is well in their homes when it is not. If I choose to publish this work, I will entitle it "Behind the Family Portrait." The family portrait always looks perfect, with everyone clean, dressed up, and smiling, but many times, it is just a façade of what is actually happening in the family. Sometimes, the issues can be so dysfunctional that there are siblings in the same picture who are not speaking to each other. In this context, the

dysfunction is very prevalent because all of the family drama transcends into the church. There are church board meetings when siblings and cousins get into deep arguments, and as the pastor, I have to mediate. While some pastors may find this project to be too conflicting, I desire that we deal with the issues and, more importantly, that we recognize them as dysfunctional, generational, and sinful.

I had great concerns about the success of this project because I did not know if the participants would open up. With over thirty people volunteering to participate, I had to narrow it down to ten, and I was intentional about the participants being people who are known to be trustworthy with the confidence of others. Such intentionality played a major role in the participants' feeling comfortable about sharing some very personal details of their lives. It has been almost a month since the project, and I still have not heard a word about what was shared behind those closed doors. For our church context, that is a small miracle. Another concern is that with such a subject matter, feelings and anxieties would be triggered. I was intentional about staying alert, and while I saw some facial expressions that indicated that the discussion or a comment "touched a nerve," there were no full triggers noted during the project, other than the one that I shared above. Again, I had counselors in the group to assist with that if necessary. In the following week, I called each person separately to gauge their feelings or "takeaways" from the project, and they all shared that they thought it was much needed and a great resource for them. Everyone believed that ultimately this project would benefit future generations the most. I shared in the final module that this was not a "one and done" encounter with this subject matter and that to fully discern and address dysfunction would take many years. I reminded them that generational dysfunction takes decades, even centuries to build up;

therefore, it cannot be eradicated overnight but would take a commitment from this core group to stay committed to teaching others what dysfunction looks like and encouraging others to start to break the generational "curses" that plague their families and church body. This work would most likely go beyond my tenure as pastor of the church, and that is why I wanted the members, especially leaders, to be just as passionate about and committed to addressing it.

When I look at the results of the post-project questionnaire, I see that five of the ten participants felt as if they could discern dysfunction and be equipped to address it within their family and church members. That is 50%, and I consider that to be a great start. I believe that some, if not all, of the other 50% of the participants will grow more comfortable with these two areas of action as we continue to do the work that was started in this project. We have committed to meeting quarterly as a group and continuing our discussions, reviewing our genograms, and helping each other with addressing specific issues of dysfunction. Again, in my opinion, this project was very successful because the hypothesis was for them to learn to discern and identify dysfunction, and 90% stated that they were better able to do that, while 50% felt equipped to help others. I could not have asked for more commitment, with 100% of the participants attending at least three of the six modules, and no one missed more than one module. For a project that required a commitment of six Saturdays during the summer, the attendance was great. The commitment to this project and appreciation for the work that I have done were validating and affirmed that this was an appropriate and much-needed subject matter for this

context. Piney Grove members will serve as a model for other Black churches to follow as they continue to complete this good work that the Lord has started in them.

APPENDIX A

EVENT LETTER

GREATER PINEY GROVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
POST OFFICE BOX 628, 5135 HIGHWAY 83 SOUTH
MAXTON, NORTH CAROLINA 28364
Email: gmurdaugh@nccumc.org

Rev. Gypsie Murdaugh, Pastor **Mobile: (910) 474-3393**

June 17, 2024

Dear Church Leaders,

As I prepare to begin my project for my doctoral program, I am seeking volunteers to participate in workshops that will include Bible studies, two sessions with a clinical psychologist, open discussions, journaling, and questionnaires. I promise that it sounds more taxing than it will be because we will find hope and joy as we grow and learn together about how to discern and identify generational family dysfunction. We will also discuss how this affects the church body. The dates are all Saturdays from July 13th - August 17th for an hour and a half each morning. Refreshments will be served. If you are interested in learning more, please let me know. I would appreciate everyone responding so that I will know how many of you are willing to help me with this profound work that I believe will be transformative for us all. You will also be receiving a text from me, because I do not have everyone on the leadership team's email address, and some do not have email accounts.

Thanks for your anticipated support.

Yours In Christ

Gypsie Murdaugh

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Investigator Name: Gypsie Murdaugh

Contact Information: 514 Arrington Street
Rowland, North Carolina 28383
910-474-3393
gmurdaugh1@united.edu

Introduction: I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary.

Purpose: I am conducting a study on "Equipping The Black Church To Address Issues Of Generational Familial Dysfunction."

Requirements for Participation: You are invited because you are an officer or committee chairperson of Greater Piney Grove United Methodist Church.

Procedures: If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a project that will last a total of six weeks with three 1.5 hour sessions with a clinical psychologist and three 1.5 bible study sessions. You will also be asked to complete a pre-project questionnaire and a post-project questionnaire.

Human Subject Participation: All participants will be over the age of eighteen and of sound mind. They will be fully aware of the subject-matter and the expectations of their participation. No pregnant women, seniors over the age of eighty, or vulnerable persons will be used as participants in this project.

Risks: Because participants will be discussing familial issues that may go back for generations, there may be possibility that a memory or discussion will trigger some level of anxiety or other psychological affect. Therefore, a licensed therapist will be present at every session in case a participant needs assistance.

Benefits: The participants will benefit from this project by learning how to discern and recognize familial dysfunction. This will help them to begin to break the cycles that their families have been dealing with for generations. This will also benefit the church context, which is family-oriented and such generational familial dysfunction has seeped into the context of the church. Also, as the investigator, I will benefit as I also grow in my discernment of familial dysfunction.

Voluntariness: Participation is voluntary and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You can also stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your membership in the congregation, your relationship with the investigator or whatever else you think this study may have an impact upon. If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact the investigator directly: in person, on the phone, or electronic communication. Her contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all of

the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time. No risks will be incurred as a result of discontinuing your participation.

Confidentiality: We will be careful to keep your information confidential, and we will ask you and all the focus group members to keep the discussion confidential as well. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private. I will be the only one with access to your information. The files will be kept in a locked cabinet and I will have the only key. Your name will not be used and if an assistant is used to compile the research information, they will not have access to your identity.

Summary: If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me.

Signature: By affixing your signature below, you agree that you have read this consent, or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be angry if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Name _____
Date _____

APPENDIX C

PRE-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-Project Questionnaire

1. Year that you became a member of Greater Piney Grove UMC. ___ *The purpose of this question is to determine the length of time that the participant has been a member of the context.*

2. Have you ever been a leader in the church? If so, what position(s)? *The purpose of this question is to determine the level of participation that the individual has in the church and the leadership positions that the person has held.*

3. Are you a member of the one of the foundational families of the church? If so, how many generations does your family go back as members? _____
The purpose of this question is to determine if the participant is a member of a family in the context and highly possibly a member of a family that is wrestling with generational familial dysfunction, as well as how deep the generations go back.

4. What is your definition of dysfunction? _____
The purpose of this question is to gain pre-project knowledge of the participant's definition regarding dysfunctional behavior.

5. Are you able to identify any dysfunction in your family either now or in past generations? If so, please share details. _____
The purpose of this question is to get better insight into the participant's ability to identify dysfunction either presently or from the past.

6. Have you experienced or seen this dysfunctional behavior within the church setting? *Because one of the foundational beliefs of this work is that the generational familial dysfunction has seeped into the context of this family-oriented church, the purpose of this question is to determine if the participant has recognized such.*

APPENDIX D

POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

Post-Project Questionnaire

1. Upon participating in this project, now what is your definition of dysfunction? *The purpose is to determine if the participant is able to give a different or deeper definition for the word "dysfunction."*

2. Has participating in this project made you better able to identify any dysfunction in your family, either now or in past generations? If so, please share details. *The purpose of this question is to determine if the project has enabled the participant to better discern and identify the familial dysfunction and if or how it has existed for generations.*

3. Upon participating in this project, can you discern any behavior that you need to address? *The purpose of this question is to determine if the participant has grown in his/her ability to recognize that he/she needs to address.*

4. Upon participating in this project, can you discern any behavior that you or your family need to change? *The purpose of this question is to get a better insight into the participant's willingness or lack thereof to address their own dysfunctional behavior.*

5. Has this project equipped you enough that you would be able to help other church members understand and recognize dysfunctional behavior? *The purpose of this question is to determine if the project has trained and prepared the participants to train the church members to discern and address dysfunctional behavior.*

6. Please share a summary of what you learned as a result of participating in this project. *The purpose of this sharing is to learn anything else that the participant has learned that has not been ascertained in the other survey questions.*

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. What dysfunction have you discerned in your family setting?
The purpose of this question is to determine what the dysfunctional behavior is that the interviewee has discerned.

2. How long has this behavior existed in your family?
The purpose of this question is to determine if such behavior has grown into a generational dysfunction.

3. What are some of the symptoms that you see as a result of this behavior?
The purpose of this question is to give the interviewee an opportunity to share some of the issues that have been experienced by family members due to the dysfunctional behavior.

4. What have you learned from participating in this project that has helped you?
The purpose of this question is to determine the effectiveness of the project in helping the participant to deeper discern their familial dysfunction.

5. Do you feel better equipped to initiate a conversation with a family member about the dysfunctional behavior? *The purpose of this question is to determine if the participant's comfort level has grown as a result of the project.*

APPENDIX F

MODULE AGENDA

Module Agenda

EQUIPPING THE BLACK CHURCH TO DISCERN AND IDENTIFY GENERATIONAL FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

A PROJECT TOWARDS
A DOCTORATE IN MINISTRY
REV. GYPSIE MURDAUGH

MODULE AGENDA

Opening Prayer/Blessing of Food

Breakfast

Weekly Ice Breaker – "What do you need to share or let go, in order for you to be fully present?"

Opening Questions and Answers from Orientation or Prior Module

Presentation/Bible Study by Facilitator

Discussion

Wrap-Up Questions and Answers

Preview of Next Module

Closing Prayer

APPENDIX G

MODULE 4 HANDOUT

Module 4 Handout

DOCTORAL PROJECT

MODULE FOUR

GENESIS 37:1-4

"Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him" (Genesis 37:1-4, NRSVA)

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children: Jacob (Israel) was father over a troubled family. With sons from four different mothers, all living and working together, there was much rivalry and competition. Yet Jacob had a clear favorite – Joseph, who was the son of his old age."[1]

Discussion Questions:

v. Did Joseph have any knowledge about the dysfunction of his father's family lineage?
vi. Being so young, did Joseph know the truth about his own father's household?
vii. By sharing his dreams, was Joseph trying to act superior or more gifted than his brothers?
viii. What was the true cause of the brothers' hatred of Joseph?

[1] David Guzik, "Genesis 37 - Joseph Is Sold Into Slavery," Enduring Word, https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-37/.

- Jacob’s favoritism
- The gift of the coat of many colors
- The view that Jacob loved Rachel, Joseph’s mother, more than he loved theirs

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